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# FOREST DAYS

A ROMANCE OF OLD TIMES.

VOL. III.

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# FOREST DAYS

A ROMANCE OF OLD TIMES.

BY

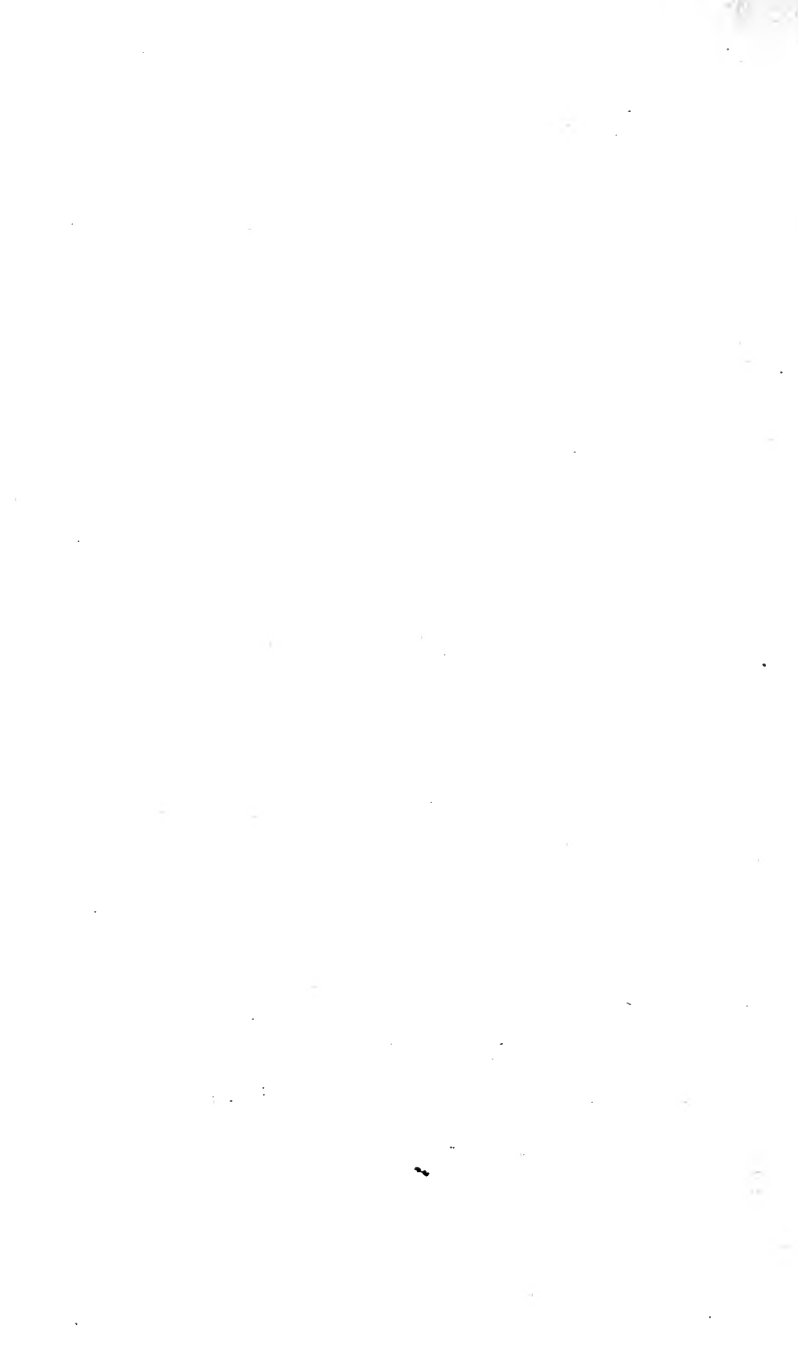
G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

AUTHOR OF "MORLEY ERNSTEIN," "THE ROBBER,"  
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON  
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET  
1843.



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## FOREST DAYS.

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### CHAPTER I.

It was an hour past midnight—the sentries had just been relieved upon the castle wall—and Hugh de Monthermer sat by the window, looking out into the depth of night, and gazing at the far twinkling of the stars. The mind was occupied in the same manner as the body, for it was looking forth into the dark night of death, and marking the small bright shining lights from heaven, that tell of other worlds beyond.

His fate had been announced to him—that he had been judged and condemned without his presence—and that the first ray of the morning

sun was to witness his death. He had solemnly appealed against the sentence, telling Lord Pembroke, who had brought the announcement thereof, that such a deed was mere murder. Neither had he left anything undone that behoved him to do, to check the base purposes of his enemies, by apprehensions of after retribution.

But they scoffed at his threats, and heeded not his remonstrances, justifying the illegal course they pursued by declaring that he had been taken in the act of treason. All communication was denied him with the world without, and even the materials for writing were refused—perhaps to guard against the chance of his doom being made known to others who might interfere to stay the execution, or, perhaps, to prevent him from recording for after times the iniquity that was about to be committed. A priest was promised him in the morning; but in the meanwhile he remained in solitude. He heard his good yeoman, Blawket, driven back from the door by the guards; and, with nought but his own thoughts to comfort and console

him, he sat preparing himself for the grave as best he might.

How often had he met the abhorred enemy, Death, in the battle-field? How often had he staked life's bright jewel on the chances of an hour? How often had fate seemed near at hand in the burning march through the barren sands of the east, and in the deadly pestilence? But in all these shapes had the grim inevitable Lord of the grave seemed less terrible than when waiting through the livelong night, with the certainty of being murdered, unre-sisting, on the morning.

Active exertion, gallant daring, the exercise of the high powers of the soul, set at nought the idea of annihilation; and when, with eager fire, man puts forth all his faculties in the moment of danger, their very possession tells him that he is immortal, and makes the open gate of the tomb appear but the portal of a better world. It is the cold, calm, slow approach of the dark hour of passage, when the mind has nought to work upon but that one idea, which smears the dart with all the venom that it is capable of

bearing. Then rise up all those dark doubts and apprehensions with which the evil spirit besieges the small garrison of faith. Then come the sweet and lingering affections of the world—the loves, the hopes, the wishes, the prospects, the enjoyments. Then speak the memories of dear things past, never to be again—of voices heard for the last time—of looks to be seen no more. Oh! it is a terrible and an awful thing, even for the stoutest heart and best prepared spirit, to wait in silence and in solitude for the approach of the King of Terrors!

The young knight strove vigorously to repel all weakness; but he could not shut out regret. Twelve hours had scarcely passed, since, in the pride of success and the vanity of hope, he had clasped her he loved in his arms, and fancied that fate itself could scarcely sever them—and now he was to lose her for ever. Would she forget him when he was gone? Would she give her hand to another? Would the gay wedding train pass by, and the minstrel's song sound loud, and the laugh, and the smile, and

the jest go round, and all be joyful in the halls of Lindwell, and he lay mouldering in the cold earth hard by? But love, and trust, and confidence said, No; and, though it might be selfish, there was a balm in the belief that Lucy would mourn for him when he was gone—ay, that she had promised to love him and be his even beyond the grave.

Of such things were his thoughts, as he gazed forth on that solemn night; but suddenly something, he knew not what, called his attention from himself; and he looked down from the window of his chamber upon the top of the wall below. The distance was some thirty feet, the night was dark, for the moon had gone early down, but, even in the dim obscurity, he thought he saw something like a man's head appear above the battlement.

In a moment after, with a bound as if it had been thrown over by an engine, a human body sprang upon the top of the wall, ran forward to the tower in which he was confined, and struck the stonework with its arm. The next instant, without any apparent footing, he could perceive one leg stretched upwards, while the

hand seemed to have obtained a grasp of the wall itself, and then the rest of the body ascended to the height of about four feet from the ground, sticking fast, like a squirrel swarming up a large beech tree. A long thin arm was then extended, far overhead, to a deep window, just beneath that at which the young knight stood, and by it the whole body was drawn up into the aperture of the wall, while a sentinel passed by with slow and measured steps. As soon as the soldier was gone, the arm was again stretched forth in the direction of the casement from which Hugh was gazing down, and the hand struck once or twice against the wall, in different places, making a slight grating sound, as if it were armed with some metal instrument. At length it remained fixed, and then the head and shoulders were protruded from the opening of the window below, the feet resting upon the stonework.

Then came one of those extraordinary efforts of agility and pliability of limb which Hugh had never witnessed but in one being on the earth. By that single hold which the fingers seemed to have of the wall, the body was again swung up till the knee and the hand met, and the left arm



was stretched out towards the sill of the casement above.

Although the figure appeared to be hump-backed and, consequently, in that respect unlike the dwarf, Tangel, Hugh de Monthermer could not doubt that it was he, and, reaching down as far as possible, he whispered, "Take my hand, Tangel!"

In an instant the long, thin, monkey-like fingers of the dwarf clasped round his, as if they had been an iron vice, and with a bound that nearly threw the stout young soldier off his balance, Tangel sprang through the window into the room.

"Ha, ha!" said he, in a low tone, "who can keep out Tangel?"

"No one, it seems, my good boy," answered Hugh, "but what come you here for? I fear I cannot descend as you have mounted."

"Here, help me off with my burden," rejoined the boy, "and thou wilt soon see what I come for. But we must whisper like mice, for tyrants have sharper ears than hares, and keener eyes than cats. Here's a priest's gown and a hood for thee, and a chorister's cope for Tangel. Thou

art just the height of the king's confessor, and I shall pass for his pouncet-bearer. Here's a ladder, too, not much thicker than a spider's web, but strong enough to bear up the fat friar of Barnesdale."

The feelings of Hugh de Monthermer, at that moment, must be conceived by the reader, for I will not attempt to describe them. Life, liberty, hope, were before him; and the transition was as great from despair to joy as it had lately been from happiness to grief. He caught the poor dwarf in his arms, saying, "If I live, boy, I will reward thee. If I die, thy heart must do it."

"No thanks to me," replied Tangel, in a somewhat trembling voice, "no thanks to me, good knight. It is all Robin's doing, though I was glad enough to have a finger in the pie, and he, great cart horse, could no more climb up that wall than he could leap over Lincoln Church. But, come, come, fix these hooks to the window—get the gown over thee, and then let us look out for the sentinel—he will pass again before we have all ready."

"But there are sentries in the outer court,

too," said Hugh de Monthermer. "How shall we manage, if we meet with any of them?"

"Give them the word," said Tangel. "I waited, clinging as close to the wall as ivy to an old tower, till I heard the round pass, and the word given. It was 'The three leopards.' But there he goes now—let us away—quick!—he will soon be back again!"

Letting the ladder, made of silken rope, gently down from the window, Hugh bade the dwarf go first, but Tangel replied, "No, no, I will come after, and bring the ladder with me. I have got my own staircase on the four daggers that I fixed into the crevices. Go down, holy father, go down, and if that book be a breviary take it with you."

"It may serve as such," said Hugh; "but, ere I go, let me leave them a message; and, taking a piece of half-charred wood from the fire, he wrote a few words with it upon the wall. Then approaching the window he issued forth, and descended easily and rapidly to the battlements.

The dwarf seemed to have some difficulty in unfastening the hooks of the ladder, however, for

he did not follow so quickly as Hugh expected ; and, whether the sentinel had turned before he got fully to the end of his beat, or his pace was more rapid than before, I know not, but, ere the boy began to descend, the soldier's steps were heard coming round from the other angle of the wall. Hugh gave a quick glance up to the window in the tower, and saw that the dwarf was aware of the sentry's approach, and also that the ladder hung so close to the building as not to be perceptible without near examination. His mind was made up in an instant ; and, folding his arms upon his chest, he drew the hood farther over his face, and walked on to meet the sentinel, with a slow pace, and his eyes bent upon the ground.

The moment the soldier turned the angle, and saw him, he exclaimed, " Who goes there ? Stand ! Give the word ! "

" The three leopards," replied Hugh, in a calm tone.

" Pass," cried the sentinel. " Your blessing, holy father ! This is a dark night."

" Dominus vobiscum," replied Hugh ; " it is dark, indeed, my son. But no nights are

dark to the eye of God;" and turning with the sentinel on his round, he added, in a loud tone, as they passed immediately under the window, "You did not see my boy upon your round, did you? He was to come hither with the books; but, marry, he is a truant knave, and is doubtless loitering with the pages in the King's ante-room."

"I saw him not, holy father," said the soldier. "Is the King still up?"

"Ay, is he," answered Hugh, "and will be for this hour to come." And on he walked by the side of the man till they were out of sight of the window.

"The boy is marvellous long in coming," observed the pretended priest.

"Shall we turn back and see, good father?" asked the soldier.

"Oh, no!" replied Hugh; "this is the way he should come; for he has to pass round by the court, you know; unless, indeed, he goes up the steps at the other side." Just as he spoke, the sound of quick feet following was heard, and the sentry turned sharply once more, exclaiming, "Who goes there?"

“The three leopards,” said a childish voice, very unlike that of Tangel; but Tangel it proved to be, dressed in his white cope and hood, and bearing a small bundle beneath his arm.

“Thou hast been playing truant,” cried the knight, “and shalt do penance for this.”

But he did not venture to carry far his pretended reprimand, lest some mistake between him and Tangel might discover the deceit; and walking on by the side of the sentinel to the top of the flight of steps which led down into the great court close by another of the towers; he there wished him good night, giving him a blessing in a solemn tone.

The guard at the bottom of the stone stairs heard the conversation between his comrade and the seeming priest above, and without even asking the word walked on beside the young knight and the dwarf, and passed them to the sentry at the gate.

The large wooden door under the archway was ajar, while several of the soldiery were loitering without, telling rude tales of love to some of the fair girls of Nottingham, who had

ventured upon the drawbridge, even at that late hour, to lose their time and reputation (if they had any) with the men-at-arms; for human nature and its follies were the same, or very nearly the same then as now. At the end of the drawbridge, however, was a sentinel with his partizan in his hand, taking sufficient part in the merriment of the others, notwithstanding his being on duty, to make him start forward in alarm at the sound of a step, and show his alertness by lowering his weapon and fiercely demanding the word. Hugh gave it at once; adding, in a quiet tone,

“Ought you not to be more upon your guard, my son, against those who come in than those who go out?”

“Pass on, and mind your own business, Sir Priest!” replied the sentry, who was not a very reverent son of the church. “These knaves in their black gowns,” he murmured, “would have no one speak to a pretty lass but themselves.”

Hugh had continued to advance, and he certainly did not now pause to discuss the question of duty with the soldier, but hastened into the town through a great part of which it was ab-

solutely necessary to pass, and then through the dark streets of Nottingham, descending the hill rapidly, and breathing lighter at every step.

“ Hark !” he said at length, speaking to the boy in a low tone. “ Do you not hear people following !”

“ It is likely,” replied the dwarf ; “ I am not alone in Nottingham. We may have some difficulty at the gates, however ; for the warder at the tower is as surly as a bear, and though we all know him well, yet it is a robe of cendal to a kersey jerkin he refuses to get up and turn the key.”

In another minute the question was put to the proof by the boy running forward to the town gate, and knocking at the low door under the arch. At first there was no answer whatsoever, and the dwarf, after knocking again, shouted loudly, “ Ho, Matthew Pole ! Matthew Pole ! open the door for a reverend father, who is going forth to shrive a sick man.”

“ To shrive a harlot, or a barrel of sack !” grumbled an angry voice from within. “ I will get up for none of ye ; and if I did, I could not open the gate wide enough at this hour of the



night for the fat friar of Barnsdale to roll his belly out."

"'Tis neither he of Barnsdale nor Tuck either," cried the boy, "but a holy priest come from the castle."

"Then he had better go back whence he came," replied the warder. "Get you gone, or I will throw that over thee which will soil thy garments for many a day. Get thee gone, I say, and let me sleep, till these foul revelling lords come down from the castle, who go out every night to lie at Lamley."

A noise of prancing horses, and of eager voices, was heard the moment after coming rapidly down the hill; and Hugh de Monthermer, putting his hand under his black robe, seized the hilt of the anelace, or sharp knife, which had been accidentally left with him when his sword was taken away.

"I will sell my life dearly," he said, speaking to the dwarf.

"Stand in the dark," whispered Tangel, "and they will not see you;—these are the Lords who sleep out of the town."

Hugh de Monthermer had scarcely time to

draw back when a troop of horsemen, who had in fact left the castle before him, came down to the gate, having followed the highway, while he had taken a shorter cut by some of the many flights of steps of which the good town of Nottingham was full.

“What ho!” cried a voice, which the young lord recognised right well. “Open the gate. Are you the warder’s boy?”

“No, please you, noble lord,” replied Tangel. “And I cannot make old surly Matthew Pole draw a bolt or turn a key, although he knows we are in haste.”

“What ho! open the gate,” repeated the voice in a loud tone. “How know you that I am a noble lord, my man?”

“Because you sit your horse like the Earl of Mortimer,” answered the boy.

“You may say so, indeed,” said the other, laughing. “But who is that under the arch?”

“That is my uncle,” replied Tangel, “the good priest of Pierrepont. He is going to shrive the poor man that fell over the rock, as your lordship knows, just at sun-down.”

“I know nothing about him,” exclaimed

Mortimer ; “ but I do know, that if this warder comes not forth, his thrift shall be a short one. Go in, Jenkin, and slit me his ears with thy knife till they be the shape of a cur’s.—Ha ! here he comes at length. How now, warder ! How dare you keep me waiting here ? By the Lord, I am minded to hang thee over the gate.”

The burly old man grumbled forth something about his lanthorn having gone out ; and then added, in a louder tone, “ I did not expect you, my lord, so soon, to-night. You are wont to be an hour later.”

“ Ay, but we have some sharp business at daybreak to-morrow,” cried Mortimer ; “ so we must be a-bed by times.”

Slowly, and as if unwillingly, the warder drew down the large oak bar, saying, “ You must give the word, my lord.”

“ The three leopards,” replied Mortimer. “ Come, quick, open the gate, or, by my hali-dome, it shall be worse for you.”

With provoking slowness, however, the old man undid bolt after bolt, and then threw wide the heavy wooden valves ; and, without further

question, the train of Mortimer rode out, his very robes brushing against Hugh de Monthermer as he passed. The young knight and the boy followed slowly; and before the gates could be closed again, coming rapidly from the neighbouring streets, several other men on foot issued forth in silence, without giving any word to the warder.

“ Ah, you thieves !” said good Matthew Pole to the last of them, “ if I chose to shut you in, there would be fine hanging to-morrow.”

“ No, no,” replied the man, “ there would be one hung to-night, good Matthew, and he would serve for all. You don’t think we let the hanging begin without having the first hand in it ?”

A straggling house or two on the outside of the gate were passed in a few minutes ; a lane amongst trees lay to the right and left, and a little stile presented itself in the hedge, formed of two broad stones laid perpendicularly, and two horizontal ones for steps. Over these the boy sprang at a leap before Hugh de Monthermer, who followed quickly, though somewhat more deliberately.

The moment he was past, a hand seized his

arm, and a voice cried, "Free, free, my good lord! By my fay, we shall have all the honest part of the Court under the green boughs of Sherwood ere long. Taking the king's venison will become the only lawful resource of honest men; for if they don't strike at his deer, he will strike at their heads."

"Ah! Robin, is that you?" said Hugh. "This is all thy doing, I know; and I owe thee life."

"Faith, not mine," replied Robin Hood, "'tis the boy's—'tis the boy's! My best contrivance was to get into the castle court to-morrow, by one device or another; secure the gate, send an arrow into Mortimer's heart, and another into the headsman's eye; make a general fight of it, while you were set free, and then run away as best we could. 'Twas a bad scheme; but yet at that early hour we could have carried it through, while one half the world was asleep, and the other unarmed. But Tangel declared that he could run up the wall like a cat, so we let him try, taking care to have men and ladders ready to bring him off safe if he were caught. So 'tis his doing, my lord; for you con-

trived to get the elf's love while he was with you."

"And he has mine for ever," answered Hugh. "But alas! my love can be of little benefit to any one now."

"Nay, nay, never think so," replied the Outlaw; "as much benefit as ever, my good lord. Cast off your courtly garments, take to the forest-green, with your own strong right hand defend yourself and your friends, set courts and kings at nought and defiance, and you will never want the means of doing a kind act to those who serve you. I ought not, perhaps, to boast, but Robin Hood, the king of Sherwood, has not less power within his own domain than the Third Harry on the throne of England—but, by my faith, I hope the blessed Virgin has holpen Scathelock and the Miller with their band to get out of the gates, for they are long a coming, and there will be fine hunting in every hole of Nottingham to-morrow morning—I came over the wall with Hardy and Pell."

"They are safe enough—they are safe enough, reckless Robin," cried Tangel, "I heard the

Miller's long tongue, bandying words with surly old Matthew Pole, as if ever one bell stopped another. But hark! there are their steps, and we had better get on, for I have a call to sleep just now."

"Well, thou shalt sleep as long as thou wilt to-morrow," said Robin, "for thy good service to night; but by your leave, my lord, you and I must ride far, for it were as well to leave no trace of you in the neighbourhood of Nottingham. Here are strong horses nigh at hand, and if you follow my counsel, you will be five-and-twenty miles from the place where they expect to find you by daybreak. It will be better for us all to disperse, and to quit this part of the county; my men have their orders, and I am ready."

The counsel was one that Hugh de Monthermer was very willing to follow, and ere many minutes more had passed, he and Robin Hood were riding through the dark shady roads of Sherwood, as fast as the obscurity of the night would permit.

## CHAPTER II.

It was in the small wooden house in the lower part of the town, to which we have seen Sir William Geary lead his worthy companion Guy de Margan, that unhappy Kate Greenly sat in the recess of a window which looked over the meadows, and through which a faint gleam of the autumnal sun was streaming in upon her. She was as beautiful as ever, perhaps more so, for her face was paler and more refined, and though she had lost the glow of rustic health, her countenance had gained a peculiar depth of expression which was fine, though sad to see.

Her eyes were fixed intently upon those autumnal fields, with a straining gaze, and a knitted brow; but it was not of them she



thought—no, nor of any of the many things which they might recal to her mind. It was not of the happy days of innocence; it was not of the companions of her childhood; it was not of the sports of her youth; it was not of her father's house; it was not of the honest lover whose pure affection she had despised, whose generous heart she had well nigh broken. No, no, it was of none of these things! It was of him who had wronged and betrayed her, it was of him who had trampled and despised, it was of him whom she now hated with a fierce and angry hate—ay, hated and feared, and yet loved—strange as it may seem to say so,—of him whom she had resolved to punish and destroy, and for whom she yet felt a yearning tenderness which made every act she did against him seem like plunging a knife into her own heart.

Oh! had Richard de Ashby then, even then, suffered his hard and cruel spirit to be softened towards the girl whom he had wronged, if he had soothed and tranquillized, and calmed her, if he had used but one tender word, one of all the arts which he had employed to seduce her,

Kate Greenly would have poured forth her blood to serve him, and would have died ere she had followed out the stern course which she purposed to pursue. But he was all selfishness, and that selfishness was his destruction.

Hark, it is his step upon the stairs ! But she no longer flies to meet him with the look of love and total devotion which marked her greeting in former days. The glance of fear and doubt crosses her countenance ; she dare not let him see that she has been thoughtful ; she snatches up the distaff and the wheel ; she bends her head over the thread, and with a sickening heart she hears the coming of the foot, the tread of which was once music to her ear.

He entered the room, with a red spot upon his brow, with his teeth hard set, with his lip drawn down. There was excited and angry passion in every line of his face, there was a fierceness in his very step which made her grieve she had not avoided him. It was too late, however ; for though he scarcely seemed to see her, she could not quit the room without passing by him. He advanced as if coming direct towards her, but ere he had much passed the middle of

the chamber, he stopped and stamped his foot, exclaiming—"Curses upon it!" Then turning to the unhappy girl, he cried—"Get thee to thy chamber! What dost thou idling here, minion? Prepare in a few days to go back to thy father—or, if thou likest it better," he added, with a contemptuous smile,—“to thy franklin lover; he may have thee cheaper now, and find thee a rare leman.”

Kate stood and gazed at him for a moment; but for once passion did not master her, and she answered, well knowing that whatever seemed her wish would be rejected—"I am ready to go back to my father. I have made up my mind to it.—Thou treatest me ill, Richard de Ashby, I will live with thee no longer. I will go at once."

"No, by the Lord, thou shalt not!" he cried, resolved not to lose the object of his tyranny. "Get thee to thy chamber, I say; I will send thee back when I think fit—away! I expect others here!" And Kate Greenly, without reply, moved towards the door.

As she passed, he felt a strong desire to strike

her, for the angry passion that was in his heart at that moment, called loudly for some object on which to vent itself. She spoke not, however, she did not even look at him; so there was no pretext; and biting his lip and knitting his brow, he remained gazing at her as she moved along, with a vague impression of her beauty and grace sinking into his dark mind, and mingling one foul passion with another.

When she was gone and the door was closed, Richard de Ashby clasped his hands together, and walked up and down the room, murmuring, "That idiot Mortimer!—When he had him in his hand—to leave him in his chamber which any child could scale!—Out upon the fool! With dungeons as deep as a well close by!—But he cares nought, so that he get the land. How is this step to be overleaped? Ha! here they come!"

In a moment or two after, the door of the room again opened, and four men came in; two dressed as noblemen of the Court, and two as inferior persons. Those, however, whose apparel taught one to expect that high and

courteous demeanour for which the Norman nobleman was remarkable, when not moved by the coarse passions to which the habits of the time gave full sway, were far from possessing anything like easy grace, or manly dignity. There was a saucy swaggering air, indeed, an affected indifference, mingled with a quick and anxious turn of the eye, a restless furtive glance, which bespoke the low bred and licentious man of crime and debauchery, uncertain of his position, doubtful of his safety, and though bold and fearless in moments of personal danger, yet ever watchful against the individual enmity or public vengeance which the acts of his life had well deserved.

“ Well, Dickon,” cried the first who entered, “ we have thought of the matter well. — But what makes thee look so dull? Has the Prior of St. Peter’s made love to thy paramour? Or the king won thy money at cross and pile, or——”

“ Pshaw! no nonsense, Ellerby,” exclaimed Richard de Ashby; “ I am in a mood that will bear no jesting. What is the matter with me?”

By my faith, not a little matter. Here, my bitterest enemy—you know Hugh of Monthermer.—He was in Mortimer's hands, doomed to death, his head was to be struck off this morning at day-break. Mortimer and Pembroke were to divide his lands; and I and Guy de Margan to have revenge for our share——”

“ I would have had a slice of the lands too,” interrupted Ellerby, “ or a purse or two of the gold, had I been in your place.—Well ?”

“ Well ! Ill I say,” replied Richard de Ashby. “ What would you ? the fool Mortimer, instead of plunging him into a dungeon where no escape was possible, leaves him in his chamber, thinking he cannot get out, because the window is some twenty or thirty feet from the top of the wall, with a sentry pacing underneath. Of course the man who knows his life is gone if he stays, may well risk it to fly, and when the door is opened this morning, the prisoner is gone; while on the wall of the room, written with charcoal, one reads:—‘ My Lord the Prince, —Taking advantage of the permission you gave, in case the base falsehood of my enemies should

prevail against me, and having been condemned to death unheard, ere you could return to defend me, I have escaped from this chamber, but am ever ready to prove my innocence in a lawful manner, either by trial in court, or by wager of battle against any of my accusers. Let any one efface this ere the Prince sees it, if he dare.'— With this brag he ended; and now Guy de Margan raves; but Mortimer and Pembroke laugh, believing that they shall still share the lands! I threw some salt into their mead, however, telling them that as they had left him with his head on, he had a tongue in it that would soon clear him at the Prince's return, and as he had saved his life would save his lands, also.—Is it not enough to drive one mad, to see such fools mar such well-laid schemes?"

"No, no," replied the man who had followed Ellerby, "nothing should drive one a whit madder than the drone of a bagpipe drives a turnspit dog.—Give a howl and have done with it, Sir Richard."

"I will tell you what, Dighton," said Richard de Ashby; "you men wear away all your feelings as the edge of a knife on a grindstone——"

“ That sharpens,” interrupted Dighton.

“ Ay, if held the right way,” replied Richard, “ but you have never known hate such as I feel.”

“ Perhaps not,” answered Dighton, with a look of indifference, “ for I always put a friend out of the way before I hate him heartily.—It is better never to let things get to a head. If on the first quarrel which you have with a man, you send him travelling upon the long road which has neither turning nor returning, you are sure never to have a difference with him again, and I have found that the best plan.”

“ But suppose you cannot ?” asked Richard de Ashby. “ You may be weaker, less skilful, may not have opportunity—suppose you cannot, I say ?”

“ Why then employ a friend who can !” replied the bravo. “ There are numbers of excellent good gentlemen who are always ready, upon certain considerations, to take up any man’s quarrel; and it is but from the folly of others who choose to deal with such things themselves, that they have not full employment. Here is Ellerby tolerably good, both at lance and broadsword ; and I,” he continued, looking



down with a self-sufficient air at the swelling muscles of his leg and thigh—"and I do not often fail to remove an unpleasant companion from the way of a friend. Then if secrecy be wanting, we are as wise as we are strong—are we not Ellerby?"

"To be sure," answered Ellerby, in the same swaggering manner, "we are perfect in everything, and fit for everything—as great statesmen as De Montfort, as great soldiers as Prince Edward, as great generals as Gloucester, as great friends as Damon and Pythias."

"And as great rogues," added Richard de Ashby, who was not to be taken in by swagger—"and as great rogues, Ellerby, as—But no, I will not insult you by a comparison. You are incomparable in that respect at least, or only to be compared to each other."

"Very complimentary, indeed," said Ellerby, "especially when we come here to do you a favour."

"Not without your reward present and future," replied Richard de Ashby; "You come not to serve me without serving yourselves too."

“ Well, well,” cried Dighton, who carried the daring of his villany to a somewhat impudent excess—“ we must not fall out, lest certain other people should come by their own. There’s an old proverb against it”—for the proverb was old even in his day. “ But to overlook your matter of spleen, dearly beloved Richard, and forgetting this Monthermer affair, let us take the affair up where Ellerby was beginning. We have thought well of the business you have in hand, and judge it very feasible indeed. We are willing to undertake it. If we can get the old man once to come out of sight of his people alone, we will ensure that he shall never walk back into Lindwell gates on his own feet. However, there is a thing or two to be said upon other affairs ;—but speak you, Ellerby—speak ! You are an orator. I, a mere man of action.”

“ Well, what is the matter ?” asked Richard de Ashby ; “ If you can do the deed, the sooner it is done the better.”

“ True,” said Ellerby, “ but there is something more, my beloved friend. The doing the deed may be easier than getting the reward.

When this old man is gone, there still stands between you and the fair lands of Ashby a stout young bull-headed lord, called Alured, who having ample fortune and fewer vices, is likely to outlive you by half a century, and bequeath the world a thriving race of younkers to succeed to his honours and his lands."

"Leave him to me," replied Richard; "his bull-head, as you call it, will soon be run against some wall that will break it, as I shall arrange the matter."

"But even if such be the case," rejoined Ellerby, "how can we be sure that Richard Earl of Ashby will not turn up his nose at us, his poor friends—as is much the mode with men in high station—refuse us all reward but that small sum in gold which he now gives, and dare us to do our worst, as we cannot condemn him without condemning ourselves likewise? We must have it under your hand, good Richard, that you have prompted us to this deed, and promise us the two thousand pounds of silver as our reward."

Richard de Ashby looked at him with a

sneering smile, though his heart was full of wrath, and he answered—

“ You must think me some boy, raw from the colleges, and ready to play against you with piped dice. No, no, Dighton! Ellerby, you are mistaken! Being all of us of that kind and character of man who does not trust his neighbour, we must have mutual sureties, that is clear. Now hear me:—I will make over to you by bond, this day, my castle in Hereford, with all the land thereunto appertaining.—You know it well.—In the bond there shall be a clause of redemption; so that if I pay you two thousand pounds of silver before this day two years, the castle shall be mine again. Such is what I propose. But, in the meantime, you shall give me a covenant, signed with your hand, to do the deed that we have agreed upon. Then shall we all be in the power of each other.”

“ And pray what are we to have?” asked one of the two inferior men, who had followed the others into the room, and who seemed to have been almost forgotten by the rest.

“ What you were promised,” replied Richard

de Ashby; "each of you fifty French crowns of gold this night, when the deed is done!"

"Ay," cried the spokesman; "but we must have a part of that two thousand pounds of silver."

But Dighton took him by the breast, in a joking manner, saying, "Hold thy tongue, parson! I will settle with thee about that. If thou art not hanged before the money is paid, we will share as officer and soldier. You and Dicky Keen shall have a fourth part between you, and we two the rest."

This promise appeared to satisfy perfectly his worthy coadjutor, who seemed to rely upon the old proverb, that "there is honour amongst thieves," for the performance of the engagement. Such, however, was not the case with Richard de Ashby and the two superior cut-throats, who proceeded to draw up the two documents agreed upon for their mutual security.

The bond of Richard de Ashby was soon prepared, and the only difficulty that presented itself regarded the written promise he had exacted from his two friends; for Digh-

ton boldly avowed that he could not write any word but his own name, and Ellerby was very diffident of his own capacity, though either would have done mortal combat with any man who denied that they were gentlemen by birth and education. Richard de Ashby, for his part, positively declined to indite the document himself, even upon the promise of their signature; and at length Ellerby, after much prompting and assistance, perpetrated the act with various curious processes of spelling and arrangement.

“And now,” said Richard de Ashby, when this was accomplished, “all that remains is to lure the old man from the castle, which we had better set about at once; for if Alured were to return, our plan were marred.”

“But upon what pretence,” asked Dighton, “will you get him to come forth?”

“I have one ready,” answered Richard de Ashby; “one that will serve my purpose in other respects, too. But who we shall get to bear the letter, is the question.”

“Why not the woman you have with you?”

said Ellerby. "We could dress her up as a footboy."

"No," replied Richard de Ashby, thoughtfully, "no!—I did buy her a page's dress to employ her in any little things that might require skill and concealment, for she is apt and shrewd enough; but in this matter I dare not trust her. When the old man and the note were found she would tell all.—She needs some further training yet, and she shall have it; but at present we must deal by other hands.—You must get some rude peasant boy as you go along, and only one of you must show himself even to him. But I will write the note and come along with you myself. There is no time to spare."

Richard de Ashby then—who was, as we have hinted, a skilful scribe—sat down and composed the fatal letter to his kinsman which was to draw him from his home and give him to the hands of the murderers: and, knowing well the Earl's character, he took care so to frame the epistle as to insure its full effect. The handwriting, too, he disguised as much as might be; though never having seen that of the person

whose name he assumed, he endeavoured to make it as much like the hand of a clerk or copyist as possible. The note was to the following effect :—

“ To the most noble and valiant Lord the Earl  
of Ashby, greeting.

“ Dear and well-beloved Lord,

“ A false, cruel, and horrible accusation having been brought against me, and I having been doomed to death unheard by the ears of justice and clemency, have been compelled to seek my own safety by flight from the castle of Nottingham, leaving my fair fame and character undefended. Now I do adjure you, as one who has ever been held the mirror of chivalry, and the honour of arms and nobility, to meet me this day at the hour of three, by what is called the Bull’s Hawthorn ; which you, my lord, know well, and which is but one poor mile from your manor of Lindwell. I will there give to you, my lord, the most undoubted proofs of my perfect innocence, beseeching you to become my advocate before the King and the



Prince, and to defend me as none but one so noble will venture to do. Lest you should think that I seek to entangle you more on my behalf, I hereby give you back all promises made to me regarding the Lady Lucy, your daughter, and declare them null and void, unless at some future time you shall think fit to confirm them. It is needful, as I need not say, that you should come totally alone, for even the chattering of a page might do me to death.

“ HUGH DE MONTHERMER.”

Richard de Ashby mentioned to none of his companions what the letter contained; but folding it, he tied it with a piece of yellow silk and sealed it, stamping it with the haft of Ellerby's dagger.

“ Now,” he cried—“ now all is ready; let us be gone.—Are your horses below?”

“ They are at the back of the house,” said Dighton.

“ Quick, then, to the saddle!” cried their companion. “ I will get mine, and join you in a minute, to ride with you some way along the road; for I must have speedy tidings when the deed is done.”

“By my faith,” said Ellerby, walking towards the door, “you are growing a man of action, Richard!—But keep us not waiting.”

“Not longer than to come round,” replied Richard de Ashby, descending the stairs with them; and in a minute after, the heavy door of the house banged to behind the party of assassins.

Scarcely were they gone, when poor Kate Greenly ran into the room, and snatched up a large brown wimple which lay in the window, casting it over her head as if to go forth. Her eyes were wild and eager, her face pale, her lips bloodless, and her whole frame trembling. She seemed confused, too, as well as agitated, and muttered to herself, “Oh, horrible! Where can I find help?—What can I do?—I will seek these men; but it will be too late if I go a-foot. I will take the page’s dress again, and hire a horse.

She paused, and thought for an instant, adding, “But the mere is far from Lindwell,—’tis the other way. It will be too late!—It will be too late!”

Her eyes fixed vacantly on the window, and a moment after she uttered a slight scream, for she saw a head gazing at her through the small panes. Shaken and horrified, the least thing alarmed her, so that she caught at the back of a tall chair for support, keeping her eyes fixed, with a look of terror, upon the face before her, and asking herself whether it was real, or some frightful vision of her own imagination.

“It is the boy!” she cried, at length, “it is the dwarf boy I saw with them in the wood!” and, running forward with an unsteady step, she undid the great bolt of the casement.

Tangel instantly forced himself through, and sprang in, exclaiming, “Ha! ha! I watched them all out, and then climbed to tell you——”

But, before he could end his sentence, Kate Greenly sank fainting upon the floor beside him.

## CHAPTER III.

THERE was a low deserted house, standing far back from the road, in a piece of common ground skirting the forest between Lindwell and Nottingham. There were some trees before it, and some bushes, which screened all but the thatched roof from observation as the traveller passed along. There was a dull pond, too, covered with green weed, between it and the trees, which, exhaling unwholesome dews, covered the front of the miserable-looking place with yellow lichens, and filled the air with myriads of droning gnats : and there it stood, with the holes, where door and window had been, gaping vacantly, like the places of eyes and nose in a dead man's skull. All the

wood-work had been carried away, and part even of the thatch, so that a more desolate and miserable place could not be met with, perhaps, in all the world, though, at that time, there was many a deserted house in England; and many a hearth, which had once blazed brightly amidst a circle of happy faces, was then dark and cold.

It was a fit haunt for a murderer; and before the door appeared Richard de Ashby, a few moments after he had parted from his fell companions, sending them onward to perform the bloody task he had allotted them. His dark countenance was anxious and thoughtful. There was a look of uncertainty and hesitation about his face; ay, and his heart was quivering with that agony of doubt and fear which is almost sure to occupy some space between the scheme and the execution of crime. The ill deed in which he was now engaged was one that he was not used to. It was no longer some strong bad passion hurrying him on, step by step, from vice to vice, and sin to sin; but it was a headlong leap over one of those great barriers, raised up by conscience, and supported by law, divine and human, in

order to stop the criminal on his course to death, destruction, and eternal punishment.

He sprang from his horse at the door—he entered the cottage—he stood for a moment in the midst—he held his hands tightly clasped together, and then he strode towards the door again, murmuring, “I will call them back—I can overtake them yet.”

But then he thought of the bond that he had given—of the objects that he had in view—of rank, and wealth, and station—of Lucy de Ashby, and her beauty—of triumph over the hated Monthermer.

Never, never, did Satan, with all his wiles and artifices, more splendidly bring up before the eye of imagination all the inducements that could tempt a selfish, licentious, heartless man, to the commission of a great crime, than the fiend did then for the destruction of Richard de Ashby.

He paused ere he re-crossed the threshold—he paused and hesitated. “It is too late,” he thought, “they will but scoff at me. It is too late; the die is cast, and I must abide by what it turns up. This is but sorry firm-

ness after all! Did I not resolve on calm deliberation, and shall I regret now?"

He paced up and down the chamber for a while, and then again murmured, "I wish I had brought Kate with me. I might have toyed or teased away this dreary hour with her—But no, I could not trust her in such deeds as this.—They must be at the hawthorn by this time. I hope they will take care to conceal themselves well, or the old man will get frightened; he is of a suspicious nature. There's plenty of cover to hide them.—I will go tie the horse behind the house that no one may see him."

His true motive was to occupy the time, for thought was very heavy upon him, and he contrived to spend some ten minutes in the task, speaking to the charger, and patting him; not that he was a kindly master, even to a beast, but for the time the animal was a companion to him, and that was the relief which he most desired. He then turned into the cottage again, and once more stood with his arms folded over his chest in the midst.

"What if they fail?" he asked himself. "What

if he suspect something, and come with help at hand? They might be taken, and my bond found upon them—They might confess, and, to save themselves, destroy me—'Twere a deed well worthy of Ellerby.—No, no, 'tis not likely—he will never suspect anything——Hark! there is a horse! I will look out and see;" and, creeping round the pond to the side of the bushes, he peered through upon the road.

But he was mistaken, there was no horse there. The sound was in his own imagination, and he returned to his place of shelter, feeling the autumnal air chilly, though the day was in no degree cold. It was that the blood in his own veins had, in every drop, the feverish thrill of anxiety and dreadful expectation.

No words can tell the state of that miserable man's mind during the space of two hours, which elapsed while he remained in that cottage. Remorse and fear had possession of him altogether—ay, fear; for although we have acknowledged that perhaps the only good quality he possessed was courage, yet as resolution is a very different thing from bravery, so were the



terrors that possessed his mind at that moment of a very distinct character from those which seize the trembling coward on the battle field.

There was the dread of detection, shame, exposure, the hissing scorn of the whole world, everlasting infamy as well as punishment. Death was the least part indeed of what he feared, and could he have been sure that means would be afforded him to terminate his own existence in case of failure, the chance of such a result would have lost half its terror.

But there was remorse besides—remorse which he had stifled till it was too late. He saw his kinsman's white hair ; he saw his countenance. He endeavoured in vain to call it up before his eyes, with some of those frowns or haughty looks upon it, which his own vices and follies had very often produced. There was nothing there now but the smile of kindness, but the look of generous satisfaction with which from time to time the old earl had bestowed upon him some favour, or afforded him some assistance. Memory would not perform the task he wished to put upon it. She gave him up to the anguish of conscience, without even awakening the bad passions of the

past to palliate the deeds of the present. He leaned on the dismantled window-frame with his heart scorched and seared, without a tear to moisten his burning lid, without one place on which the mind could rest in peace. The hell of the wicked always begins upon earth, and the foul fiend had already the spirit in his grasp, and revelled in the luxury of torture.

At length there came a distant sound, and starting up, he ran forth to look out. His ears no longer deceived him, the noise increased each moment, it was horses' feet coming rapidly along the road. He gazed earnestly towards Lindwell; but instead of those whom he expected to see, he beheld a large party of cavalry riding by at full speed, and as they passed on before him, galloping away towards Nottingham, the towering form of Prince Edward rising by the full head above any of his train, caught the eye of the watcher, and explained their appearance there. The rapid tramp died away, and all was silent again.

Some twenty minutes more elapsed, and then there was a duller sound; but still it was like the footfalls of horses coming quick. Once more he

gazed forth, and now he beheld, much nearer than he expected, four mounted men approaching the cottage, but avoiding the hard road, and riding over the turf of the common. One of them seemed to be supporting another by the arm, who bent somewhat feebly towards his horse's head, and appeared ready to fall. In a minute they came round, and Ellerby—springing to the ground, while the man they had called Parson, held the rein of Dighton's horse—aided the latter to dismount, and led him into the cottage.

“It is done,” said Ellerby, in a low voice—“it is done, but Dighton is badly hurt. The old man passed his sword through him, when first he struck him, and would have killed him outright, if I had not stabbed the savage old boar behind. We cast him into the little sand-pit there—but poor Dighton is bad, and can scarce sit his horse.”

“Yes, yes, I can,” said Dighton, in a faint tone; “if I had a little wine I could get on.”

“I have some here in a bottle,” cried one of the others.

Dighton drank, and it seemed to revive him. "I have had worse than this before now," he said, "I can go on now; and we had better make haste, for there were certainly people coming."

"Away, then," said Richard de Ashby, "away then to Lenton, and then run down to Bridgeford. If you could get to Thorp tonight, you would be safe. I will to the castle, and be ready to console my fair cousin when the news reaches her."

"She will have heard it before that," murmured Dighton, "for I tell you there were certainly people coming," and taking another deep draught of the wine, he contrived to walk, almost unassisted, to the horse's side, and mount. There was a black look, however, under his eyes, a bloodless paleness about his face, and a livid hue in his lips, which told that his wound, though "not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door," to use the words of Mercutio, "was enough."

"Fail not to give me tidings of you," said Richard de Ashby, speaking to Ellerby; and going

round to the back of the cottage, he mounted his horse—which by his pawing, seemed to show that the long delay had not been less tedious to himself than to his master—and galloped away to Lindwell, anxious to reach the castle before the news.

Even at the rapid pace at which he went, he could not escape thought. Black care was behind him; and eagerly he turned in his mind all the consequences of the deed that had been done. His own conduct was the first consideration, and a strange consideration it was. What was he to say? what was he to do? At every step he must act a part: ay, and—like the poor player, who sometimes, distressed in circumstances, pained in body, or grieved in mind, has to go laughing through the merry comedy—the character which Richard de Ashby had now to play, was the direct reverse of all the feelings of his heart.

Crime, however, produces an excitement of a certain kind independent of the very gratification obtained. We have, in our own day, seen murderers laugh and sing and make merry,

with hands scarcely washed from the blood of their victim ; and, strange to say, when Richard de Ashby resolved to assume a face of cheerful gaiety on arriving at Lindwell Castle, the only danger was that he would over-act the part. In truth, remorse, like a tiger, lay waiting to spring upon him the moment action ceased ; but for the time his mind was much relieved, and more buoyant than it had been while watching in the cottage. Doubt, hesitation, apprehensions regarding the failure of the deed, were all gone : it was done irretrievably. It was accomplished, not only without any mischance, but with a circumstance which promised to remove one of his accomplices, and that was no slight satisfaction. So smooth does one crime make the way for another, that he who had lately pondered with no small hesitation the very deed in which he was engaged, now felt glancing through his mind with satisfaction the thought of disposing of Ellerby also by some similar means, and leaving none but the two inferior ruffians, whom he might easily attach to himself, and render serviceable in the future.

Crimes are gregarious beings, and are seldom, if ever, met with single.

His horse was fleet; the distance was not great; and in the space of about a quarter of an hour, he saw the towers of Lindwell rising over the woody slopes around. He then checked his speed, in some degree, going on at a quick, but still an easy canter, knowing that there was always some one on the watch-tower, who might remark the furious gallop at which he came, unless he slackened his pace.

He had soon reached the open space—he had soon mounted the hill. The drawbridge was down, the doors of the barbican were open, one of the warders was sitting quietly on a bench in the sun, two or three stout yeomen and armed men were amusing themselves between the two gates, and all turned to salute their master's kinsman as he passed, without giving the slightest indication that anything was known amiss within the walls of Lindwell.

Dismounting at the inner gate, and giving his horse to one of the grooms, Richard de Ashby was upon the point of asking for his

cousin Lucy, but recollecting his part again, he inquired if the Earl were there, adding, "I thought to have met him between this and Nottingham."

"No, Sir Richard," replied the porter, moving slowly back the great gate of the hall; "my lord had ordered his horses and train to be ready for Nottingham by noon, but news came from the city, which stopped him; and then the son of old Ugtred, the swine-driver, brought a letter, on which my lord went out on foot and alone. He would not even have his page, but carried his sword himself."

"Methinks that was rash," said Richard de Ashby; "these are not times to trust to. Can I speak with the Lady Lucy? Know you where she is?"

"In her own chamber, I fancy, poor lady," replied the porter. "Go, Ned, and tell her, that Sir Richard is in the hall, and would fain see her."

Richard de Ashby was a hypocrite—he was a hypocrite in everything. Though a man of strong passions and of fierce disposition, it was not when he seemed most furious or most angry



that he really was so, any more than when, as on the present occasion, he seemed most gay and light-hearted, that he was in reality cheerful. While the page went to seek for his fair cousin, he walked up and down the hall, humming a light tune, and seemingly occupied with nothing but those dancing phantasms of imagination which serve a mind at ease to while away a few idle minutes. The only thing which, during the whole time he was kept waiting, could have betrayed even to eyes far more keen and scrutinizing than those which now rested upon him, that there were more deep and anxious thoughts within, was a sudden start that he gave on hearing some noise and several persons speaking loudly in the court; but the sounds quickly passed away, and the next minute Lucy herself entered the hall.

She was pale, and her countenance seemed thoughtful; but her demeanour was calm; and though she had never loved the man that stood before her, she addressed him in a kind tone, saying, "I give you good day, Richard; we have not seen you for a long time."

"No, fair cousin," he replied, "and I rode

here in haste from Nottingham, thinking I might be the bearer of good tidings to you ; but I fancy from your look you have heard them already."

"What may they be?" said Lucy, the colour slightly tinging her cheek.

"Why," answered Richard de Ashby, "they are that a certain noble lord, a dearer friend of yours than mine, fair cousin, who lay in high peril in Nottingham Castle, has made his escape last night."

"So I have heard," replied Lucy, her eyes seeking the ground ; "people tell me they had condemned him to death without hearing him."

"Not exactly so," said Richard de Ashby ; "they heard him once, but then——"

"Oh, lady ! oh, lady !" cried one of the servants, running into the hall, with a face as pale as ashes, and a wild, frightened look, "here's a yeoman from Eastwood who says he has seen my lord lying murdered in the pit under the Bull's hawthorn !"

Lucy gazed at the man for a moment or two, with her large dark eyes wide open, and a vacant look upon her countenance, as if her mind

refused to comprehend the sudden and horrible news she heard; but the next moment she turned as pale as ashes, and fell like a corpse upon the pavement.

“Fool! you have killed her!” cried Richard de Ashby, really angry; “you should have told her more gently.—Call her women hither.”

The man remarked not, in his own surprise and horror, that Richard de Ashby was less moved by the tidings he had given, than by the effect they produced upon Lucy. All was now agitation and confusion, however; and in the midst of it, the poor girl was removed to her own chamber. The peasant, who had brought the news, was summoned to the presence of the murdered man’s kinsman, and informed him that, in passing along, at the top of the bank, he had been startled by the sight of fresh blood, and at first thought some deer had been killed there, but, looking over the edge, he had seen a human body lying under the bank, and, on getting down into the pit, had recognised the person of the Earl.

He was quite dead, the man said, with a cut

upon the head, and a dagger still remaining in a wound on his right side. Instantly coming away for help to bear him home, he had found by the way, not far from the pit, the murdered man's sword, which he picked up and brought with him. On examination, the blade was found to be bloody, so that the Earl had evidently used it with some effect, but the peasant had found no other traces of a conflict, and had come on with all speed for aid.

One of the flat boards, which in that day, placed upon trestles, served as dining-tables in the castle hall, was now carried out by a large party of the Earl's servants and retainers, in order to bring in the corpse. Richard de Ashby put himself at their head, and by his direction they all went well armed, lest, as he said, there should be some force of enemies near. It was now his part to assume grief and consternation; and as they advanced towards the well-known spot, he felt, it must be acknowledged, his heart sink, when he thought of the first look of the dead man's face. But he was resolute, and went on, preparing his mind to assume the appearance

of passionate sorrow and horror, calculating every gesture and every word.

The old hawthorn tree, which was a well-known rendezvous for various sylvan sports, was soon in sight, and a few steps more brought them to the bloody spot, near the edge of the pit, where both the green grass and the yellow sand were deeply stained with gore in several places. Many an exclamation of grief and rage burst from the attendants, and Richard de Ashby, with a shudder, cried, "Oh, this is terrible!"

"Hallo! but where's the body?" cried a man, who had advanced to the side of the pit.

"Don't you see it?" said the peasant who had brought the news, stepping forward to point it out. "By the Lord, it is gone!"

Richard de Ashby now became agitated indeed.

"Gone!" he exclaimed, looking down, "Gone!—The murderers have come back to carry it off!" and, running round to a spot where a little path descended, after the manner of a rude flight of steps, into the sandpit, he

made his way down, followed by the rest, and searched all around.

The spot where the body had lain was plainly to be seen, marked, both by some blood which must have flowed after the fall from above, and also by a fragment of the Earl's silken pourpoint, which had been caught and torn off by a black thornbush, as he fell.

"They cannot be far off," said the peasant, "for the poor gentleman was a heavy man to carry, and there seemed nobody near when I was here."

"Pshaw!" cried Richard de Ashby, "there might have been a hundred amongst the bushes and trees without your seeing them. However," he continued, eagerly, "let us beat the ground all round. Some one, run back to the castle for horses; if we pursue quickly, we may very likely find the murderers with the corpse in their hands."

"It may be, Sir Richard," said one of the attendants, "that some of the neighbouring yeomen, or franklins, coming and going from Eastwood to Nottingham market, which falls

to-day, may have chanced upon the body, and carried it to some house or cottage near."

"Well, we must discover it at all events," said Richard de Ashby, who feared that one-half of his purpose might be frustrated if the letter, which he had written under the name of Hugh de Monthermer, was not actually found upon the corpse. "Spread round! spread round! Let us follow up every path by which the body could be borne, shouting from time to time to each other, that we may not be altogether separated. But here come more men down from the castle; we shall have plenty now. Let six or eight stay here till the horses arrive, then mount, and pursue each horse-road and open track for some two or three miles; they cannot have gone much farther.

All efforts, however, were vain. Not a trace could be found of the body, or of those who had taken it; and, although Richard de Ashby at first had entertained no doubt that they would find it in the hands of some of the neighbouring peasantry, and only feared that the important letter might be by any chance lost or destroyed,

he soon became anxious, in no ordinary degree, to know what had become of the body itself.

Had it been found, he asked himself, by those bold tenants of Sherwood, whose shrewdness, determination, and activity he well knew? and if so, might not the dagger, which Ellerby had left in the wound, and with the haft of which he himself had sealed the letter, prove, at some after period, a clue to the real murderers? His heart was ill at ease. Apprehension took possession of him again; and, towards nightfall, he returned to the castle, accompanied by a number of the men who by that time had rejoined him, with a spirit depressed and gloomy, and a heart ill at ease indeed.



## CHAPTER IV.

THE grey twilight hung over the world when Richard de Ashby re-entered the outer court of the castle at Lindwell; but still he could perceive horses saddled and dusty, attendants running hither and thither, armed men standing in knots, as if resting themselves for a moment after a journey, and every indication of the arrival of some party having taken place during his absence. His first thought was, that the corpse must have been found and brought back by some of the small bodies of Prince Edward's troops, which were moving about in all directions; but he soon saw that such an event was impossible, as he himself, or some of those about him, must have met any party which had passed

near the scene of the murder. The next instant, in going by one of the little groups of soldiers we have mentioned, he recognised the face of some of the retainers of the house of Ashby, and exclaimed, "What! has the Lord Alured returned?"

"Not half an hour ago, Sir Richard," replied a soldier; and Richard de Ashby hurried on like lightning into the hall. There was a coldness at his heart, indeed, as he thought of meeting the man whose father's blood was upon his hand, and against whose own life he was devising schemes as dark as those which had just been executed. But he was most anxious nevertheless to meet his cousin, ere he had conversed long with Lucy, and to give those impressions regarding the causes of the bloody deed which best suited his purposes.

Alured de Ashby was not in the great hall, but Richard, without a moment's delay, mounted the great staircase to the upper chamber, where Hugh de Monthermer's last happy hour had been passed with Lucy. There were voices speaking within, but the kinsman paused not a

moment ; and opening the door, he found the sister weeping in the arms of her brother. They had been sometime together ; the first burst of sorrow, in speaking of their father's death, had passed away ; an accidental word had caused them to converse of other things connected therewith, indeed, but not absolutely relating to that subject, and the first words that met Richard de Ashby's ear were spoken by the Lord Alured.

“Never, Lucy,” he was saying—“never! Fear not, dear girl! I will never force your inclination. I will try to make you happy in your own way. As my poor father promised, so I promise too.”

Their dark kinsman saw at once that the proud and stubborn heart of his hasty cousin was softened by the touch of grief, and that he had made a promise which no other circumstances would have drawn from him, but which—however much he might regret it at an after period—would never be retracted.

Lucy started on her cousin's entrance ; and, why she knew not, but a shudder passed over her as she beheld him. He advanced towards

them, however, with an assumption of frank and kindly sympathy, holding out a hand to each. But Lucy avoided taking it, though not markedly, and saying in a low voice to her brother, "I cannot speak with any one, Alured," she glided away through the door which led to her own apartments, leaving Richard de Ashby with all the bitter purposes of his heart only strengthened by what he had seen and heard.

Alured took his cousin's hand at once, asking, "Have you brought in the body? Where have you laid him?"

In a rapid but clear manner, Richard explained that the search had been ineffectual, and told all that had been done in vain for the discovery of the corpse. After some time spent in conjectures as to what could have become of the body, the peasant who had first discovered it was called in, and questioned strictly as to what he had seen, and his knowledge of the old Lord's person. His replies, however, left no doubt in regard to the facts of the murder; and when he was dismissed, Alured turned, with a frowning

brow and a bewildered eye, to his cousin, asking, "Who can have done this?"

Richard de Ashby looked down in silence for a moment, as if almost unwilling to reply, and then answered, "I know of but one man whom he has offended."

"Who, who?" demanded Alured, sharply. "I know of none."

"None, but Hugh de Monthermer," said Richard de Ashby.

"Hugh de Monthermer!" cried the young Earl.—"Offended him! Why he has loaded him with favour. 'Twas his letter, telling me that he intended to give our Lucy's hand to one of our old enemies, that brought me back with such speed. Offended him! He is the last man that had cause of complaint."

"You know not, Alured—you know not all," cried his false cousin. "Far be it from me to accuse Hugh de Monthermer behind his back. I have ever said what I have had to say of him boldly, and to his face; and all I wish to imply is, without making any accusation whatsoever, that I know of not one man on earth whom

your poor father has offended but Hugh de Monthermer."

"And how offended him?" asked the young Earl.

"By withdrawing his promise of your sister's hand," answered his cousin. "'Tis but yesterday, upon some quarrel—I know not what—that he who is now dead retracted every rash engagement of the kind, and told him he should never have her. Lucy will tell you the same."

"Ha!" cried Alured, knitting his brows thoughtfully—"Ha! But—no, no, no! To do him justice, Monthermer is too noble ever to draw his sword upon an old man like that. His name was never stained with any lowly act. He might be a proud enemy, but never a base one."

"I dare say it is so;" answered Richard; "though I have seen some mean things, too. Did he not avoid meeting you in arms, on that quarrel concerning my poor little paramour? But all this matters not; I bring no charge against him—'tis but suspicion, at the most. Only when I recollect that yesterday your father crossed all his hopes, and that Guy de Margan,

Geary, and the rest who were with this poor Earl, told me that there was a violent quarrel, with high and fierce words on both sides, I may well say that he was offended—and, as far as I know, he was the only one offended—by the good old man. Lucy will tell you more, perhaps.”

“Stay!” cried Alured, “I will go and ask her.”

“Nay,” rejoined his cousin, “I must away with all speed to Nottingham, to learn if aught has been heard of the body there. I will ask Guy de Margan and the others, what really passed when they were here yesterday, and let you know early to-morrow.”

“Bring them with you—bring them with you!” said Alured.

“I will,” replied Richard; “but in the meantime, by your good leave, my lord, I will take some of your men with me, for I came alone, and am not well loved, as you know, of these Monthermers.”

“Take what men you will,” said the young Earl; “but yet I cannot think they have had a hand in this. Good night, Richard—good night!”

So prone is the mind of man to suspicion, so intimately are we convinced in our own hearts of the fallibility of human nature at every point, that accusation often repeated will ever leave a doubt in the most candid mind. "Be thou as cold as ice, as chaste as snow, thou shalt not 'scape calumny," cried Shakspeare, addressing woman; and he might have said to the whole race of man—"Armour thyself in the whole panoply of virtue, cover thee from head to foot in the triple steel of honour, honesty, and a pure heart, still the poisoned dart of malice shall pierce through and wound thee, if it do not destroy."

In the heart of Alured de Ashby, there had never been a doubt that Hugh de Monthermer was, in every thought and in every deed, as high, as noble, and as true, as ever was man on earth; and yet—alas, that it should be so!—the words of a false, base man, whom he himself knew to be full of faults and detected in falsehoods, left a suspicion on his mind, in favour of which, his jealous hatred of the race of Monthermer rose up with an angry and clamorous voice.



It was with such feelings that he now strode away to his sister's chamber; but ere he knocked at the door he paused thoughtfully, remembering that she was already grieved and shaken by the sad events of that evening. He called to mind that he was her only protector, her only near relation, now; and a feeling of greater tenderness than he had ever before suffered to take possession of his heart rose out of their relative position to each other, and caused him to soften his tone and manner as far as possible.

He knocked at the door, then, and went in, finding Lucy with her maids; the latter following mechanically the embroidery—on which one half a woman's life was then spent,—the former sitting in the window, far from the lamp, with her cheek resting on her hand, and a handkerchief beside her to wipe away the tears that ever and anon broke from the dark shady well of her long-fringed eyes.

As gently as was in his nature to do, Alured sat down beside her, and questioned her as to what had passed on the preceding day. She answered very briefly; for his inquiries mingled

one dark and terrible stream of thought with another scarcely less dreadful. She knew little, she said, as she had not been present. She was not aware why her father had so acted; but she acknowledged that he had withdrawn his consent to her union with the man she loved, and had spoken words concerning him which had wrung and pained her heart to hear.

So far, the tale of Richard de Ashby was confirmed; and Alured left her, with a moody and uncertain mind, hesitating between new-born suspicions and the confidence which the experience of years had forced upon him. He paced the hall that night for many an hour, ever and anon sending for various members of the household, and questioning them concerning the transactions of the day. But he gained no farther tidings; and in gloom and sadness the minutes slipped away—the gay merriment, the light jest, the tranquil enjoyment, all crushed out and extinct, and every part of the castle filled with an air of sorrow and anxiety; all feeling that a terrible deed had been done, and all inquiring—“What is to come next?”

The last words of the young Earl, ere he re-

tired to rest, were, "Let horses be prepared by nine in the morning. I will to Nottingham myself. This must be sifted to the bottom."

Ere he set out, however, Richard de Ashby, accompanied by several gentlemen of the court, had reached Lindwell, and were met by Alured in the hall, booted and spurred for his departure.

"Ha! give you good day, sirs," he exclaimed, in his quick and impetuous manner, "I was about to seek you, if you had not come to me."

"This is a sad affair, my lord the Earl!" said Sir Guy de Margan. "Little did I think, when I rode over hither the day before yesterday with your noble father, that it was the last time I should see him living!"

"Sad, indeed, sir—sad, indeed!" replied the young Earl. "But the question now is, 'Who did this deed?'"

"Who shall say that?" said Sir Guy de Margan.

Alured de Ashby paused, and crushed his glove in his hand, wishing any one to touch upon the subject of the suspicions which had

been instilled into his mind, before he spoke upon them himself; but finding that Guy de Margan stopped short, he said, at length, " May I ask you, Sir Guy, to tell me the circumstances which took place here during your stay with my father yesterday? Any act of his is of importance to throw light upon this dark affair."

" I can tell you very little, my noble lord," replied Sir Guy. " When we arrived, we were told that the Lord Hugh de Monthermer was in the upper hall with your fair sister, the Lady Lucy. We all went thither together; but, as we came to the Lord Hugh with a somewhat unpleasant summons to the presence of the King, your noble father, wishing to spare his feelings, desired us to wait without at the head of the stairs, while he went in to break the tidings. We soon, however, heard high words and very angry language on the part of the young lord. Then there was much spoken in a lower tone; and then Monthermer came nearer to the door, where he stopped, and said aloud, ' You will not fail, my lord?' Your father answered, in a stern tone, ' I will meet you at the hour you named. Fear not, I will not fail!'"

Alured de Ashby turned his eyes upon his cousin with a meaning look, and Richard de Ashby raised his to heaven, and then let them sink to the earth again.

“ I heard those words myself,” said Sir William Geary, “ and thought it strange Monthermer should appoint a meeting when he was aware he was going to a prison. It seems, however, that he well knew what he was about.”

“ God send he met him not too surely !” burst forth Alured de Ashby, with his eyes flashing.

“ After all, we may be quite mistaken,” observed Richard, who knew that now, having sown the suspicions,—ay, and watered them, too,—it was his task to affect candour, and seem to repress them ; as a man lops off branches from a tree to make it grow the stronger. “ Hugh de Monthermer was always noble and true, and of a generous nature, as you well said last night, Alured.”

“ But you forget,” said Guy de Margan, “ he was at this very time under a strong suspicion of a base treason, and had been seen

speaking secretly in the forest with three masked men unknown!"

"Ha!" cried Alured de Ashby, seizing the speaker by the arm, and gazing into his face, as if he would have read his soul.

"Ha! three masked men?"

"It is true, upon my life!" replied Guy de Margan.

"Be calm—be calm, my dear cousin," exclaimed Richard de Ashby.

"Calm!" shouted the young Earl—"Calm! with my father's blood crying for vengeance from the earth, and my sword yet undrawn!"

"But listen," said Richard. "I have thought, as we came along, of a fact which may give us some insight into this affair. Yesterday evening, on my arrival here, ere any of us knew aught of your father's death, the old hall porter told me, on my inquiring for him, that the Earl had gone forth alone, having received a letter brought by some peasant boy. He mentioned the boy's name, for he seemed to know him, and therefore I ventured, as we passed the gates just now, to

bid the warder speak with the old man, and have the boy sent for with all speed. 'Tis but right that we should know who that note came from."

"Let the porter be sent for," cried Alured—"let the porter be sent for."

"I will call him," said Richard, and left the hall.

In a moment after, he returned with the old man, followed by a young clown of some thirteen years of age. The boy stayed near the door, but Richard de Ashby advanced with the porter, the latter bowing low to his lord as he came up.

"Who brought the letter given to my father just before he went out yesterday?" demanded the young Earl, in a stern tone.

"Dickon, the son of Ugtred, the swine-driver, my lord," replied the porter; "he lives hard by, and there he stands."

"Did he say aught when he delivered it?" asked Richard de Ashby.

"Nothing, Sir Richard," answered the porter, "but to give it to my lord directly."

“Come hither, boy,” cried Alured. “Now speak truly; who gave you that letter?”

“There were four of them, my lord,” replied the boy; “but I never saw any one of them before.”

“Were they masked?” demanded Richard de Ashby.

The boy replied in the negative; but his wily questioner, having put suspicion upon the track, was satisfied, so far, and Alured proceeded.

“What did they say to you?” he asked.

“They bade me take it to the castle,” replied the boy, “and tell the people to give it to my noble lord the Earl, as fast as possible.”

“Did they say nothing more?” demanded Alured de Ashby.

The boy looked round and began to whimper.

“Speak the truth, knave,” cried the young Earl, “speak the truth, and no harm shall happen to you; but hesitate a moment, and I’ll hang you over the gate.”



“They told me,” answered the boy, still crying, “that if I saw the Earl, I might say it came from the Lord Hugh de Monthermer, but not to say so to any one else.”

The whole party looked round in each other's faces, except Richard de Ashby, who gazed down upon the ground, as if distressed, though to say truth, his heart swelled with triumph, for the words the men had used had been suggested by him at the last moment before he left them. He would not look up, however, lest his satisfaction should appear; and Alured set his teeth hard, saying, “This is enough!”

“But one more question, my good lord,” cried Sir William Geary. “Do you know the Lord Hugh de Monthermer, boy?”

“Yes, sir, very well,” replied the boy; “I have seen him many a time with my lord and my lady.”

“And was he amongst them?” asked Sir William Geary.

“Oh, no,” cried the boy, his face brightening up at once. “There was one of them as tall, and, mayhap, as strong, but then he

was black about the mazzard; and the other, who was well nigh as tall, had a wrong looking eye."

"This serves no farther purpose," said the young Earl. "I must to Nottingham at once. You, gentlemen, will forgive a son who has his father's death to avenge; but you must not quit my castle unrefreshed. Richard will play the host's part while I am absent; so fare you well, with many thanks for your coming.—Ho! are my horses ready, there?"

## CHAPTER V.

It was night; and in the castle of Nottingham sat the Princess Eleanor, with one or two ladies working at their embroidery near. Each had a silver lamp beside her; and while they plied the busy needle, they spoke in low tones, sometimes of the rumours of the day, sometimes of the colours of this or that flower, that grew up beneath their hands upon the frame. The princess was differently employed; for though an embroidery frame stood near her also, she had turned away from it, and by the light of a taper at her side was reading attentively a paper which she held in her hand. There was a pleased smile upon her countenance, the high and noble expression of which was seldom what may be called very

cheerful, though rarely very sad ; for as yet she never had cause for actual sadness ; and even during the imprisonment of her beloved husband, amidst the wild chances of civil war, and the daily dangers of faction and strife, her heart had been lighted by high hope and confidence in the all-protecting hand of Heaven.

In every countenance that is at all capable of displaying what is passing in the mind—every countenance, except the dull, unlettered book, where mere animal desires appear written in their unvarying coarseness—there are two expressions ; the one permanent, pervading every change and indicating the natural disposition—the inherent qualities of the spirit within ; the other, altering with every affection of the mind, brightening with joy or hope, growing dark under sorrow and disappointment, but still receiving a peculiar character from the permanent expression, as the sunshine and the cloud cast different light and shade upon the brown masses of the wood and the wild waters of the sea.

The permanent expression of Eleanor's countenance was calm, and full of that thoughtfulness

which approaches, in some degree, the bounds of melancholy ; and yet the transient expression was often gay and happy in a very high degree ; for that very thoughtfulness and sensibility of character which produced the former, enabled her to love, and hope, and enjoy, with the highest which sparkled in the latter. And now, upon her countenance was a look of well-pleased relief, as if something had grieved her and was taken away ; and after she had read the paper, she suffered her hand to drop over the arm of the chair, looking up, with her large, dark eyes, towards heaven, as noble minds generally do when the heart is busy with high and elevating thoughts.

“ I was sure,” she murmured to herself—“ I was sure that young man was not guilty of that crime with which they charged him ; and I am convinced also that he is as little guilty of this that they now lay to his account.”

A page stood near the door, as if waiting for some reply, now fixing his eyes upon the ground, now stealing a furtive glance at the pretty faces bending over their embroidery. To him

Eleanor now beckoned, saying, "Come hither; take the letter back to my dear lord, and say I thank him for the sight of it. Tell him I would fain speak with him when his leisure serves; and that I beseech him, when the Lady Lucy comes, to send her to me, that I may accompany her to the presence of the king. She will need a friend beside her."

The boy took the letter, bowed, and retired; and Eleanor resumed her work, pausing, from time to time, as if to think, and then busying her hands again, though her mind went on with other things. In about a quarter of an hour the door opened, and Edward entered, with a brow somewhat sad and gloomy. Nor did that expression altogether pass away, though the accustomed smile cheered it for a moment, as he met her whom he so deeply loved.

"She cannot be long," he said, after a few words of greeting. "This is a strange as well as a dark affair."

"But you do not think him guilty?" demanded Eleanor.

"Assuredly not," replied the Prince; "but it

has so happened—all has been so arranged, that I fear he will seem guilty though he be not. You read that letter, and you saw how easily he explained all that appeared suspicious in his former conduct; and yet a body of barons, Mortimer amongst the rest, were ready enough to urge my father to put him to death, without those forms and circumstances of customary law which are the only safeguards of men's liberty."

"Do you think they would have executed him?" demanded Eleanor.

"They would have murdered him," replied the Prince, "for such a death without law is murder."

Eleanor put her hands before her eyes, and after a moment's pause, added, "And yet he was innocent, clearly innocent—oh! I never doubted it, Edward! I have seen him, when you knew it not, gaze upon the countenance of my noble prince; and in his face, as in a moving picture, rise up a thousand images of kindly thoughts within;—affection, gratitude, esteem, and admiration; and I could have sworn that he would never plot against your

father's throne, however reckless be the men of this world, of faith and honesty."

"I was sure also," answered Edward, "for I know him well, and am convinced that when, with a mistaken zeal, he was once found in arms against us, 'twas that he thought duty and honour called him to do that which wounded his own heart even in the doing.—But 'twas not alone that conviction which made me think the late accusation false," he continued, in a lower tone, that the women near might not catch his words— "I knew the men who made it, Eleanor: I knew Mortimer to be cruel and treacherous; I knew Pembroke to be cold, and hard, and selfish. And now I find," he added, with a smile, "they were to divide his lands between them. Here was Guy de Margan, too—a thing so light and frail, one would scarce think that such a delicate vessel could hold strong passions and fierce hatreds; yet 'tis evident to me that there was no slight rancour there."

"Oh! I know, I know!" replied Eleanor. "One night, when Lucy and her lover—with my connivance, I will own—walked by the



moonlight under the southern cloisters at Eltham, this Guy de Margan, with some three or four other young idlers of the court, would have stopped her by force as she was returning to me, when the knight, whom she had just left, came up, and felled him with a blow. But hark ! she is coming, Edward. See if that be the Lady Lucy, Alice."

One of the ladies who sat near, rose, went to the door, and returned immediately, bringing Lucy de Ashby with her. She was pale and very sad, but not less beautiful than ever ; and as she came forward to the Princess, and knelt down upon the cushion at her feet to kiss her hand, she kept her dark eyes fixed upon the ground, as if she feared that, should she open them, the fountain of tears, which had so lately sprung up, would well over.

"The King has sent for you, fair lady," said Prince Edward, after Eleanor had spoken a few words of consolation to her—"the King has sent for you to ask you some questions with his own voice upon a matter very painful to you in all respects, I fear. But be comforted ; the bitter

loss you have sustained is one that every child who lives the ordinary length of life must undergo. The death of those we love is a salutary preparation for our own; and, as to the other cause of the anxiety and pain which may mingle with your feelings to-night, be assured that the noble lord who has fallen under some wrongful suspicion has now a friendly voice near to do him justice, and be raised in his behalf. We are confident of his innocence, and will maintain him to be guiltless till he can appear in person and defend his own cause."

The Prince paused, as if for an answer, but Lucy would not trust her voice with many words, merely replying, "I thank you deeply, my most gracious lord."

"I will go then to the King," continued Edward, "who has been expecting your arrival for some time. The Princess will accompany you to his presence, when he is ready to receive you. So be calm, dear lady, and firm; and, ever before you reply, think well what you are saying."

The Prince quitted the room, and Eleanor

proceeded to give that womanly comfort to her fair young friend which was better calculated to support and calm her than even the Prince's encouraging tone; for whatever may be the wisdom and the strength of man's exhortations, there is a roughness in them far different from that soothing balm which was given to the lips of woman to enable her to tranquillize and console.

But little time, however, was afforded them for conversation, a summons being almost immediately received for the lady Lucy to appear before the King; and drawing the fair girl's arm through her own, Eleanor led her to the hall where Henry was seated. The first glance of the King's countenance shewed that he was in an irritable state of mind. Weak and vacillating, as well as oppressive, he yielded, it is true, to the influence of his wiser and nobler son, but not without impatience and resistance.

The Prince was now standing on his right hand, a circle of nobles was formed in front, and next to Edward appeared Alured de Ashby—his brows bent, his eyes cast down upon the ground, and his left hand resting upon the hilt of his sword. He gave no glance towards his sister as she en-

tered, but remained stern and gloomy, without moving a feature or a muscle. The Princess seated herself in a chair beside the King, but still holding Lucy's hand, and drawing her gently close to her side.

“Lady,” said Henry, smoothing down his look, and affecting a tone of sadness, “we have been compelled to send for you, even though we thereby break in upon the sanctity of your sorrow; for it becomes necessary immediately, or at least as speedily as may be, to ascertain the author of a terrible crime, which has deprived you of a father, and us of a loving subject and faithful friend. Speak, then, and tell us what you know of this matter.”

“Sire, I know nothing,” replied Lucy, “but that my poor father left me in health some short time before the hour of three yesterday, and that long after, while I was speaking with my cousin Richard, who had just arrived from Nottingham, news came that my father was murdered.”

“Nay,” said the King, “we must hear what took place previously regarding the gentleman accused of this offence.”

“ I know not who is accused, sire,” replied Lucy, looking up with an air of surprise ; “ I have not heard that the murderer was discovered.”

“ The gentleman on whom strong suspicion lights,” rejoined the King, in a stern tone, “ is an escaped prisoner from this castle, Hugh de Monthermer.”

Lucy clasped her hands with a start, and turned as pale as death. But the next instant, the blood rushed glowing into her face, and throwing back her head with a sparkling eye and a curling lip, she cried—“ It is false ! my lord the King—it is false !—I know whence this foul suspicion has arisen. Ay, and perhaps art may have overdone itself. I have gained a light I never thought of till now, which may yet perhaps bring the felon to justice.”

The King seemed somewhat surprised at the sudden energy which had taken possession of the fair and gentle being before him.

“ Pray tell me,” he said, after gazing at her for a moment, “ whence you think this suspicion has arisen, since you say you know.”

“ It has sprung, sire,” replied Lucy, in a

calmer tone—"it has sprung from a letter which was given to my father shortly before his death. He was with me at the time. We were speaking of him who is now accused of a deed that he never dreamed of, and my father showed me the letter, saying, it came from him. I answered instantly that it was not his writing, which I have often seen. My father replied that he must have made some clerk write for him, as is so common. The explanation satisfied me, and I thought no more of it till this moment; but now I see that letter was a forgery to lure my poor father to his death."

"You read the letter, then?" enquired the King.

"I did," replied Lucy.

"Can you repeat what it contained?" asked Edward, with a look of keen anxiety.

"The matter, not the words," answered Lucy, her voice slightly faltering. "It told my father that Hugh de Monthermer, doomed to death unheard, though innocent, had escaped from the castle of Nottingham, leaving behind his fair fame undefended; and it besought the

Earl to meet him alone at the place called the Bull's hawthorn."

"The very place where he was murdered," said a voice from the circle.

"Peace, Sir Guy de Margan," cried Prince Edward, turning suddenly upon him; "you are a known enemy of the man accused."

"I, my lord!" exclaimed Guy de Margan.

"Ay, sir," replied the Prince, "we know more than you suppose. You hate him for chastising your insolence towards a lady; and we little doubt that you were well aware the friar whom you accused of carrying treasonable communications between him and Sir John Lemwood, had only been sent by the old Earl of Monthermer to beseech Sir John not to risk the life and honour of his friends by hopeless rebellion. I have it, sir, under the knight's own hand, and have also reason to believe you knew it when you made the charge. Let me not discover that you are bringing other false accusations, for there is a punishment for such offences."

"Go on, lady," said the King, as Guy de Margan shrunk back from the stern eye of the

Prince. "Go on. What more did the letter say?"

"I think it promised, sire," replied Lucy, "to give my father full proof of the innocence of the Lord Hugh, and it besought him to come alone, not even bringing a page with him. But I assert now, my lord, that letter was a forgery of some one to decoy my poor father to his death."

"May it not," asked the King, "have been the letter of an angry and disappointed man, seeking means to wreak his vengeance upon one who had denied him his daughter's hand, and disappointed his hopes? Here it is proved, fair lady, that your lover and your father quarrelled, and that the Earl promised to meet him—wherefore, or when, no one knows,—and that as soon as this young stubborn lord makes his escape from this castle of Nottingham, your father receives a letter from him, calling upon him to come alone to a secluded place. Your father is there found murdered; the boy that bears the letter is bidden to tell no one that it comes from Hugh de Monthermer; it wants but the letter to be in his writing to make the whole case clear enough."



“ My lord,” replied Lucy, earnestly, “ clear your mind from the false tales of deceitful men. Hugh and my father did not quarrel; though natural disappointment regarding one whom he loved—though scarcely worthy of such love—might make the friend of your noble son speak loud and hasty words, even to the father of his promised wife. But they did not quarrel, sire. My father saw him go, in the full hope that he would prove his innocence before your Majesty, and induce you to withdraw the bar you had placed against our union.—He came and told me so, the moment Hugh was gone. Then, sire, as to the promised meeting, I can tell you, wherefore, and when, and where, from my dead parent’s lips. It was to be here in this presence; it was to be at one hour after noon yesterday; it was to hear him fully exculpate himself of the charge then made against him, not only in the presence of your Majesty, but in the presence of Prince Edward also; and the noble Prince himself knows that my father sent a messenger to him, calling him to Nottingham with all speed, lest the voice of many enemies without one friend might prevail even with your Majesty.”

“It is true,” replied Edward, “the messenger came, and had he not been kept from me somewhat foolishly, I should have been here shortly after noon this day.”

“He did wrong,” said the King, “to suspect that we would not do him justice.”

The colour came into Edward’s cheek, and he bent down his eyes upon the ground, feeling the ridicule of his father talking of justice, when so gross an act as the late condemnation of Hugh de Monthermer had just been committed. But Henry went on to cross-question poor Lucy, to whom zeal and anxiety for her lover had given a temporary strength which was now failing rapidly.

“You said, lady,” he continued, “that the explanation which your father gave of this letter being written in another hand satisfied you completely at the time. What makes you think now that it is a forgery?—Has love nothing to do with the defence?”

The colour mounted into Lucy’s cheek, and Eleanor was about to interpose, to shield her from such questions, before such an assembly. But the poor girl gained courage both from the depth

and strength of her own feelings, and from the discourteous mockery of the King. She raised her eyes, bright and sparkling, to his face, and answered—"Perhaps love has, my lord. But has hate no part in the accusation?—God in his mercy grant that it may have none in the judgment!"

A dead silence succeeded for a moment to this bold reply; and then Lucy, turning pale again and dropping her eyes, went on to say—"You asked me why I think it forged, my lord? Because I now see a motive for the forgery, which I did not see before—because I perceive no cause why Hugh de Monthermer should not write with his own hand—because he could have had still less to kill the father of her he loved—because he did not even sign the letter; for the name was not his writing—because not even the seal was from his signet. These are strong reasons, sire—even," she added, with the tears rising into her eyes—"even if there were not a reason stronger still:—that he has ever been honest, honourable, and true; that no mean, dark act lies chronicled against him; that his

whole life gives the lie to the accusation; and that he has never taken advantage of any opportunity to do a thing that he thought to be wrong, even when the opinion of the world might have extolled the act."

She wiped the tears from her eyes, for they were now running over fast, and Eleanor rose from her seat, saying, "I beseech you, sire, let her depart. She is grieved and faint—I see it."

"One more question," rejoined Henry, "and she shall go. You say, lady, that you see a motive for the forgery;—is it that you have any suspicion of another having done this deed?"

Lucy ran her eye round all the circle, suffering it to pause for a moment upon the face of Richard de Ashby, which turned pale under her glance. She carried it round to the other extreme, however, and then replied, "I have a strong suspicion, sire."

"Of whom?" demanded the King, eagerly.

"Forgive me, gracious lord," answered Lucy; "though strong, it is but suspicion, and I, for one, will not make a charge upon suspicion alone. But let me warn my brother

Alured, who is too noble to doubt and too brave to be prudent, that those who have destroyed the father may not have any greater tenderness for the son."

Again her words were followed by a silent pause, and Eleanor, taking advantage of it, drew Lucy away, saying, "We have your leave, sire—is it not so?"

The King bowed his head; and the moment the Princess, her fair companion, and her attendants, had departed, a buzz ran round the room, while the Prince and the King spoke in a low tone together.

The young Earl of Ashby, let it be remarked, had not uttered one word during the whole of his sister's interrogation, and had scarcely moved a muscle from the time she entered, excepting changing his hand occasionally from the pomel of his sword to the hilt of his dagger. But he now stepped forward, as soon as Edward raised his head, saying, "Sire, this is a doubtful case, which, without farther evidence, cannot be tried by an ordinary court. Perhaps Lucy is right, and Hugh de Monthermer innocent.

She loves him, and I love him not; but still I will do justice to him, and own that the case is not proved against him, so far as to warrant his peers in condemning him; but there is an eye that sees, though ours be blinded—there is a Judge to decide, though mortal judges are debarred of proof. To that great Judge I will appeal the cause, and my body against his try, under God's decision, whether this man be guilty or not guilty. A son must not sit quiet, even under a doubt concerning his father's murderer; and I do beseech you, sire, to cause proclamation to be made over the whole land, that Hugh de Monthermer stands charged with the murder of William, Earl of Ashby, and is bound to appear and clear himself within fourteen days of this time."

"I must not refuse," replied the King; "the request is just and lawful."

"I must, moreover, entreat you, my lord," continued the young Earl, "not to proclaim the name of the accuser. I say it in no vanity, for, though my lance be a good one, there is not a better in all Christendom than that of Hugh de

Monthermer. But yet I doubt that he would meet me in the field, on such a quarrel as this. For his love's sake, he would not bar himself for ever from Lucy's hand, by risking the death of her brother—that is to say, if he be innocent."

"That is fair, too," replied the King; "Lord Pembroke, see such proclamation made!—and now to more cheerful thoughts! for, by my faith, our time passes here but gravely."

## CHAPTER VI.

THE forest of Sherwood, which we have already had so much occasion to notice, though at that time celebrated for its extent, and the thickness of the woody parts thereof, was not even then what it once had been, and vestiges of its former vastness were found for many miles beyond the spots where the royal meres, or forest boundaries, were then placed. A space of cultivated country would intervene; meadows and fields would stretch out, with nothing but a hawthorn or a beech overshadowing them here and there; but then suddenly would burst upon the traveller's eye a large patch of wood, of several miles in length, broken with the wild, irregular savannahs, dells, dingles, banks, and



hills, which characterized the forest he had just left behind.

This was especially the case to the north and east, but one of the largest tracts of woodland, beyond the actual meres, lay in the south-eastern part of Yorkshire. It was separated by some three or four miles of ground irregularly cultivated, and broken by occasional clumps of old trees, and even small woods, from Sherwood itself, and, being more removed from the highway between the southern portion of England and the northern border, was more wild and secluded than even the actual forest. In extent it was about five miles long, and from three to four broad, and had evidently, in former times, been a portion of the same vast woody region which occupied the whole of that part of England. No great towns lying in the country immediately surrounding it, and no lordly castle, belonging to any very powerful baron, this tract was without that constant superintendence which was exercised over the forest ground in the southern parts of the island; and the game was left open as an object of chase, alike to the yeomen of

the lands around, the monks of a neighbouring priory, and some of the inferior nobles who held estates in that district.

Under a yellow sandy bank, then, upon the edge of this wood, with tall trees rising above, and the brown leaves of autumn rustling around, sat the old Earl of Monthermer, with his nephew, Hugh, six or eight of his own retainers, and four of the band of the bold Outlaw, finishing their forest meal, on a fine afternoon, some three days after the escape of the young nobleman from Nottingham Castle.

The old Earl and his own personal attendants had all donned the forest green, but Hugh still remained in the same attire which he had worn at the court; and looking daily for the intelligence that Prince Edward had justified him with the King, and pleaded his cause with the old Earl of Ashby, he entertained not the slightest intention of taking upon him either the outlaw's life or garb.

His uncle, indeed, was of a somewhat rougher school of chivalry than himself, and, from his earliest days till his hair had grown white with

age, had known little but a life of adventure and privation, so that the calm and tranquil passing of peaceful hours seemed dull and wearisome to one whose corporeal vigour was but little decayed, and the wild sports of the forest, the mimic warfare of the chase, the constant change of circumstance, the very dangers of the outlaw's life, were to him as familiar things, pleasant as well as wholesome in their use. The old Earl had never loved but once, and that had been in early days, but love had been followed by bitterness and regret; and fixing his hopes upon his brother's son, he had forsworn the bonds of domestic life, and had no tie in wife or children to make him regret the castle hall, when he was under the boughs of the forest.

It was not so, however, with Hugh; and, though it might be agreeable enough, for a day or two, to roam the country with a bold band of foresters, yet he looked forward anxiously to the day of his return to the court, from no great love to the court itself, but for the sake of Lucy de Ashby.

Uncle and nephew, however, and all around, saw cheerfully the sun sinking, growing of a brighter and a brighter yellow as he went down, and beginning to touch the tips of the hills of Derbyshire and the clouds above them with purple and with gold. The merry song, the gay laugh, and jest passed round; and, if a memory of friends he had lost, and fortunes that were gone, and plans that were defeated, and expectations that were blasted, crossed the mind of the old Earl, they shadowed him but for a moment; and, with the true philosophy of the old soldier, he thought—"I have done my best, I have won renown, I have fought for the liberty of my country, and as for the rest, 'twill be all the same a hundred years hence."

With Hugh, hope had risen up, as we have shewn, almost as bright as ever; for in the heart of truth and honour there is a spring of confidence which needs all the burdens of age, experience, and disappointment, to weigh it down for any length of time.

"Look there!" he cried, at length—"there are three horsemen coming hither by the green

road! News from the court, I'll warrant.—A letter from Prince Edward, perhaps.”

“ Who are they, Scathelock ?” demanded the Earl. “ My eyes are dim, now-a-days ; and yours are sharp enough.”

“ The man that made the millstone,” answered Scathelock, “ cannot see much farther through it than another. And, good faith, my lord, they are still too far for me to tell who they are ; though I do wish with all my heart you, my good lord, had trusted to my eyes some six months ago. We should have had no Evesham, then.”

“ How so ?” demanded the Earl, turning eagerly towards him.

“ Why,” replied Scathelock, “ I sent you word there was a traitor amongst you, and told you who he was ; but I was not believed. And Richard de Ashby was left to snap asunder the ties between his house and the cause of the people, and to furnish the horse that bore Prince Edward from Hereford. There is more venom yet in that viper's fangs—it were well they were drawn.”

“ ’Tis Robin himself !” cried another of the men, who had risen, and, shading his eyes from the setting sun, was gazing out over the grounds below, while the old Earl had let his head droop at the memories which Scathelock’s speech called up, and sat looking sadly on the green blades of grass. “ ’Tis Robin himself ! I see his broad shoulders and his little head. You will hear his horn anon.”

“ By my faith, your eyes are keen !” cried Scathelock, as the moment after, the mellow winding of the Outlaw’s horn came in round, soft notes, up the side of the hill. “ ’Tis Robin’s own mots ! There’s none can bring such sounds out of the brass as he can. Forgive me, my lord !” he continued, to the Earl—“ I have vexed you.”

“ Not so, not so, good fellow,” answered the old man ; “ ’twas but the memories of the past. I acted then as ever, Scathelock—by what seemed best and noblest to be done ; and that man’s a fool, be his conduct what it will, who, having shaped it by the best light God gives, feels regret when he can lay his hand upon his breast, and

say, ‘ My heart is pure !’—This, then, is Robin coming? Doubtless he brings good news.”

“ To us, he is rarely an ill-omened bird,” replied Scathelock ; “ but, by my faith, the Abbot of St. Anne’s, after he has skinned his poor tenants of a heavy donation, or a king’s warden, full of fines and free gifts, or the Sheriff of Nottingham’s bailiff and collector, would not think the sight of Robin Hood’s nut head and brawny arms the pleasantest apparition he could meet with between Nottingham and Doncaster.”

“ Well, well,” rejoined another, “ if he frightens the purse-proud and the greedy, his footstep, on the threshold of the poor and the oppressed, has no ill sound, Scathelock.”

“ Wind your horn, Tim of the Lane !” cried Scathelock. “ He cannot see us, though we see him.”

In such conversation some ten minutes passed away ; at the end of which time Robin Hood and two of his companions came round under the bank, and sprang to the ground in the midst of the little party there assembled. He greeted them all frankly and with cheerful

speech; but although no frown wrinkled his brow, it was easy to perceive that his mood was not a gay one.

“Come,” he said, after his first salutation to the two noblemen was over, “what have you here to eat? By my life, we three are hungry and thirsty too. A fat brawn’s head and a bustard scarcely touched! By our Lady, a supper for an emperor! Why, my lord, it seems you have not finished yet?”

“We had well nigh ended,” said the Earl; “but in such an evening as this one loves to prolong the minutes with careless talk, good Robin. There is rich store of the prior’s wine, too, under the bank. Scathelock, it seems, resolved to make us merry.”

“He is right, he is right,” replied Robin; “the King can make men rich and noble too; but ’tis not every one can make you merry for the nonce. I wish it were.”

“Why, Robin, you seem sad,” observed Hugh de Monthermer, sitting down beside him. “If you bring me bad tidings, let me hear them quickly.”



“ Good or bad, as you take them,” answered Robin Hood; “ though some are foul enough for any ears.”

“ Well, then, speak, speak !” said Hugh de Monthermer. “ The sting of bad tidings is suspense, Robin. The burden is soon borne, when once it is taken up.—They do not believe my story ;—is it so ?”

“ No,” answered Robin Hood; “ the Prince, as I hear, has done you justice. He came over from Derby at once. I took care your letter should reach him instantly; and ere twelve hours from the time your head was to be struck off, the sentence was reversed, and you were declared innocent.”

“ And this is the administration of the law under Henry the Third ?” said the old Earl. “ The life of a peer of England is a king’s plaything.—This will mend itself.”

“ Ha !” cried Robin Hood, with a degree of sorrowful impatience in his tone, “ others have been making sport of peers’ lives besides the King. Has not that news reached you, that Lindwell Castle has a new lord ?”

Hugh de Monthermer started up, with a look

of half incredulous surprise—"Dead?" he exclaimed,—“the Earl of Ashby dead?”

“Ay, marry,” answered Robin Hood—“murdered! so they say, by the Bull’s hawthorn, under Lindwell Green, not far from the skirt of Thornywood—You know the place, my lord?”

“Right well,” replied Hugh de Monthermer; —“but is it sure, Robin?”

“Nothing is sure,” answered Robin Hood—“nothing is sure in this world that I know of. But this news is all over the country; and as I came by Southwell this morning, I heard proclamation made upon the Green concerning this sad murder.”

“This is most strange,” said Hugh; “such things will make us infidels: while fools and villains reach to honours and renown, honest men are driven to herd in Sherwood with the beasts of the forest, and good men murdered at their own castle-gate. Who can have done this, Robin?—Do you know?”

“I know right well,” replied Robin Hood. “’Tis Richard de Ashby has done it; and now the base beast—part wolf, part fox, part serpent—contrives to put the bloody deed upon another.

But he shall find himself mistaken, if my advice is followed—I will see to it, I will see to it; for I am somewhat in fault in this matter. I was warned of the purpose, and might have stopped it; but in the hurry of other things, I forgot, and was too late.”

“ Yes,” said Hugh de Monthermer, “ it could be none other—the base villain! But can you bring him to punishment, Robin?”

“ That must be your affair,” replied Robin Hood. “ I will prove his guilt; but you must punish him.”

“ That will I, right willingly,” cried Hugh de Monthermer—“ I will accuse him of the deed, and dare him to show his innocence in arms.”

“ Nay, that is not needful,” answered Robin Hood; “ ’tis he accuses you.”

“ Me? me?” asked Hugh de Monthermer.

“ What! my nephew,” exclaimed the old Earl—“ a prisoner or a fugitive?”

“ Even so,” replied the Outlaw, “ ay, and with fair and specious showing, makes his case good; forges a letter, as I hear, and doubtless has hired witnesses, too. I have not been able to gather much of how this new plot has been

framed; but, as I was going to tell you, my good lords: on Southwell Green this morning, as I passed, I saw a king's pursuivant with sundry men-at-arms, and stopping amongst the crowd, who laughed to see bold Robin Hood, the outlaw, the robber, the murderer, of much venison, stay and front the royal officers, I heard them make proclamation, saying, ' Know all men that Hugh Monthermer, Lord of Amesbury and Lenton, is accused, on strong suspicion, of traitorously and feloniously doing to death William Earl of Ashby, and that he is hereby summoned to appear before the King at Nottingham, to purge himself of the said charge by trial, oath, ordeal, or wager of battle, at his choice, according to the laws of the realm and chivalry.—Those are the very words."

" And strange ones, too," said the old Earl. " The form is somewhat varied from the usual course, and the name of the accuser left unmentioned."

" All is out of course now," answered Robin Hood, " and this not more than the rest. But it matters not—'twill come to the same in the end."

Hugh de Monthermer, while this was passing,

stood buried in thought, with his arms folded on his chest.

“The villain!” he repeated, at length—“the villain! But he shall rue the day.—I will away at once, Robin, and face him ere the world be a day older. If my right hand fail me against Richard de Ashby, my conscience must be worse than I believe it. I will away at once; I must not lie beneath such a charge an hour longer than needful.”

“Nay, nay, my good lord,” cried Robin Hood, “sit down and be ruled by me!—haste may spoil all. I have the clue fully in my hands; and although I do hope and trust to see your lance an arm’s length through the traitor, or your good sword in his false throat, yet I promise, that you shall, moreover, have the means in your hand of proving to all men’s conviction, not only that you are innocent, but that he himself is the doer of the deed. In the first place, then, you must not go to the court of England without a safe-conduct. Methinks you should know better than that.”

“Oh, but Prince Edward!” cried Hugh de Monthermer.

“ Prince Edward may be away again,” interrupted the Outlaw ; “ you must have a safe conduct, and the time spent will not be lost. Sit you down—sit you down, my lord, and take a cup of wine.—This news has shaken you.—I will arrange it all. The third day hence, you shall be at the English court ; but even then you must contrive to delay the combat for a week. Then, ere you go to the lists, you shall put the proofs which I will give you in the hand of the Prince, to be opened when the fight is over. Come, sit you down, and let us talk of it ; I’ll show you reasons for so doing. Here, one of your own men shall ride to the Prince, and ask for a safe-conduct.—He may be back by to-morrow night.”

Hugh sat down beside him again, the old Lord leaned upon the grass, his faithful followers and those of the bold forester made a circle at a little distance, passing the wine-cup round ; and—as with the general world, in which mirth and gaiety and every-day idleness have their common course, while many a tragedy is acting in the houses near—while, in the one group the jest, and the laugh, and the song went on ; in the other, was grave and deep thought, regret, and indig-

nation, and that feeling of awe with which great crimes naturally inspire the mind of man. The golden sun went down, and a cold, clear, autumnal night succeeded. A fire was lighted of dry branches, serving the purpose of a torch likewise, and still those three sat discussing the subject which was uppermost in their thoughts with long and earnest debate.

About an hour after nightfall a letter was written with materials which one or other of the forest party was seldom without ; and, as soon as it was ready, it was dispatched to Nottingham by an attendant of the old Earl, who promised to return with all speed. Still, however, the Earl, his Nephew, and the Outlaw continued their conversation, while the stars came out bright and clear, and everything around was lost to the eye but the dim outlines of the trees. The wind whispered through the branches with a long, sighing sound, and every now and then, in the manifold long pauses that broke the conference, the rustling noise was heard of a withered leaf dropping upon its dead companions that once flourished green upon the same bough, but had

fallen before it to the earth. It was as an image of the passing away of mortal life ; and such, probably, as the rustle of that leaf, is the only sound that rises up to superior beings as, one by one, we drop into the tomb which has received before us the bright and beautiful we have known ; an existence is extinguished, a state of being is over, and other things are ready to spring up from the mouldering remnants of our decay.

At length, however, the quick ear of the Outlaw caught something more : a creeping, quiet, but rapid noise—and exclaiming “ Hark !” he looked around, adding in a loud voice, “ Who goes there ?”

There was no answer, but the instant after, with a bound from the top of the bank, came down the dwarf Tangel into the midst of the party below.

“ Ha ! Robin—ha !” he exclaimed—“ I never yet could discover whether thou art ass or hare.”

“ How now, sirrah ?” cried Robin Hood, striking him a light blow with his hand ; “ I pr’ythee find more savoury comparisons.”



“Why one or the other thou must be,” said Tangel, “by thy long ears. Do what I will, I cannot catch thee napping. But I think thou art most like a hare, which we see sitting with one long ear resting, while the other stands upright, like a sentinel upon the top of a mound. But I have come far, Robin, to bring a lady’s errand to a truant knight. Here, runaway—here is a billet for thee!—It was sent for Robin Hood or any of his people—the messenger took me for a people, and so gave it to me, though, Heaven knows, they might as well have taken me for a steeple, as far as the difference of size is concerned.”

As he spoke, he handed a small billet or note to the Outlaw, who stirred the fire into a blaze, and was opening it to read, when he remarked some words written on the outside, which ran—“To the Lord Hugh of Monthermer, with speed, if he may be found—If not, for Robin Hood of Sherwood.”

“’Tis for you, my lord,” said Robin, handing it to Hugh, who instantly tore it open, and ran his eye eagerly over the contents.

When he had done so, he turned back again

and read aloud, omitting one sentence at the beginning.

“Your accuser is Richard de Ashby,”—so ran the letter; “and I tremble when I tell you my suspicion lest it should be unjust. But I have marked it on his face,—I have seen it in his changing colour,—I have heard it in the very tone of his voice. There is an impression upon me which nothing can efface that this deed was his. I know not how to counsel or advise, but it is fitting that you should know this; your own wisdom must do the rest. I fear for you; I fear for my brother Alured, too. There is but one between that man and the wealth and rank which he has long envied; he has gone too far to pause at any human means; and my apprehensions are very great for him who stands in the way.”

“Thus it is,” said the old Earl—“thus it is with the wicked; they very often contrive to cloak their acts from the wise and prudent of this world, but to innocence and simplicity seems to be given light from Heaven to detect them under any disguise.”

“Give me a woman for finding out man’s heart,” cried Robin Hood; “that is, if she loves

him not; for then all are fools.—But, come, my lord—let us seek a better place of shelter for the night; my blood is not very chilly, but still I feel it cold.—Make much of Tangel, merry men, and give him a leg of the bustard and a cup of wine; but look to the flask, look to the flask, with him. Remember last Christmas eve, Tangel, when you mistook a stag-hound for a damsel in distress, and sagely wondered in your drunkenness how she came by such a beard.”

## CHAPTER VII.

IN a dark small room, high up in the back part of one of the houses in the lower town of Nottingham, with the wall covered on one side by rough oak planking, and having on the other the sharp slope of the roof; on a wretched truckle bed, with a small table and a lamp beside it, lay the tall and powerful form of a wounded man, with languor in his eyes, and burning fever in his cheek.

On a stool at the other side sat Richard de Ashby, looking down upon him with a countenance which did not express much compassion, but on the contrary bore an angry and displeased look; and, while he gazed, his hand rested upon his dagger, with the fingers clutch-

ing, every now and then, at the hilt, as if with a strong inclination to terminate his companion's sufferings in the most speedy manner possible.

“It was madness and folly,” he said—“I repeat, it was madness and folly to bring you here into the very midst of dangers, when I showed you clearly how to shape your course.”

“We saw a party of horse upon the bridge, I tell you,” replied Dighton, for he it was who lay there, with the punishment of one of his evil deeds upon him, “and could not find a ford. But, in the name of the fiend, do not stand here talking about what is done and over; let me have 'tendance of some kind. Send for a leech, or fetch one.”

“A leech!” cried Richard de Ashby, “the man's mad! There is none but the one at the court to be found here. Would you have the whole story get abroad, and be put to death for the murder?”

“As well that, as lie and die here,” answered Dighton. “Why I tell thee, Dickon, I feel as if there were a hot iron burning through me

from my breast to my shoulder, and every throb of my heart seems to beat against it, and add to the fire. I must have some help, man!—If thou art not a devil, give me some water to drink. I am parched to death.”

Richard de Ashby walked thoughtfully across the room, and brought him a cup of water, pausing once as he did so, to gaze upon the floor and meditate.

“ I will tell thee what, Dighton,” he said, “ thou shalt have ’tendance. Kate here, it seems, saw them bring thee in. She is a marvellous leech; and when I was wounded up by Hereford at the time of the Prince’s escape, she was better than any surgeon to me. She shall look to thy wound; but mind you trust her not with a word of how you got it; for a woman’s tongue is ever a false guardian, and hers is not more to be depended on than the rest.”

“ Well,” answered the man, discontentedly, “ anything’s better than to lie here in misery, with nobody to say a word to; I dare say you would as soon see me die as live.”

“ No,” replied Richard de Ashby, with a

bitter smile, "I should not know what to do with the corpse."

"I thought so," said Dighton, "for I expected every minute, just now, that your dagger would come out of the sheath. But I have strength enough still left, Dickon, to dash your brains out against the wall, or to strangle you between my thumbs, as men do a partridge; and I do not intend to die yet, I can tell you. But come, send this girl quick; and bid her bring some healing salve with her. There is a quack-salver lives at the top of the high street; he will give her some simples to soften the wound and to take out the fire."

"I will see to it—I will see to it," replied Richard de Ashby, "and send her to you presently. I cannot visit you again to-night, for I must away to the castle, but to-morrow I will come to you."

Thus saying, he quitted the wretched room, and closed the door after him. The wounded man heard the key turn in the lock, and murmured to himself—"The scoundrel! to leave me here a whole night and day without help

or 'tendance ; but if I get better, I'll pay him for his care—I'll break his neck, or bring him to the gallows. I surely shall live—I have been wounded often before, and have always recovered,—but I never felt anything like this, and my heart seems to fail me. I saw worms and serpents round me last night, and the face of the girl I threw into the Thames up by the thicket,—it kept looking at me, blue and draggled as when she rose the last time. I heard the scream too!—Oh yes, I shall live—'tis nothing of a wound! I have seen men with great gashes—twice as large. Ha! there is some one coming!" and he started and listened as the lock was turned, and the door opened.

The step was that of a woman, and the moment after, Kate Greenly approached his bedside. Her fair face was pale, her lips had lost their rosy red, her cheek had no longer the soft, round fulness of high health; and though her eye was as lustrous and as bright as ever, yet the light thereof was of a feverish, unsteady, restless kind. There was a sort of abstracted look, too, in them. It seemed as if some all-



engrossing subject in her own heart called her thoughts continually back from external things, whenever she gave her mind to them for a moment.

Walking straight to the foot of the bed, and still holding the lamp in her hand, she gazed full and gravely upon Dighton's face; but the brain was evidently busy with other matters than that on which her eyes rested; and it was not till the wounded man exclaimed, impatiently—"Well, what do you stare at?" that she roused herself from her fit of abstraction.

"He has sent me," she said, "to tend some wounds you have received, but I can do you little good. The priest of our parish indeed gave me some small skill in surgery, but methinks 'tis more a physician for the soul than for the body that you want."

"That is no affair of thine," replied the man, sharply—"look to my wound, girl, and see if thou hast got any cooling thing that will take the fire out, for I burn, I burn!"

"Thou shalt burn worse hereafter," said Kate, sitting down by his bed-side; "but show me the hurt, though methinks 'tis of little avail."

“ There,” cried the man, “ tearing down the clothes, and exposing his brawny chest, “ ’tis nothing—a scratch—one may cover it with a finger ; and yet how red it is around, and it burns inwardly, back to my very shoulder.”

Kate stooped her head down, and held the lamp to the spot where the sword of the old Earl of Ashby had entered, and examined it attentively for a full minute. As the man had said, it was but a small and insignificant looking injury to overthrow the strength of that robust form, and lay those muscular limbs in prostrate misery upon a couch of sickness, as feeble as those of an infant. You might indeed have covered the actual spot with the point of a finger ; but round about it for more than a hand’s breadth on either side, was a space of a deep red colour, approaching to a bluish cast as it came near the wound. It was swollen, too, though not much, and one or two small white spots appeared in the midst of that fiery circle.

When she had finished her examination, she raised her eyes to the man’s face, and gazed on it again, with a look of grave and solemn thought.

“ Art thou in great pain ?” she said.

“Have I not told you,” he answered, impatiently—“it is hell.”

“No,” she replied, shaking her head, “no, ’tis nothing like hell, my friend. Thou mayest some time long to be back again there, on that bed, writhing under ten such wounds as this, rather than what thou shalt then suffer. But thou wilt be easier soon. Seest thou that small black spot upon the edge of the wound?”

“Ay,” he answered, looking from the wound to her face with an inquiring glance—“what of that?—Will that give me ease?”

“Yes,” she replied, “as it spreads. —Art thou a brave man? Dost thou fear death?”

“What do you mean, wench?” he cried, gazing eagerly in her face, “Speak out—you would drive me mad!”

“Nay,” she replied, “I would call you back to reason. You have been mad all your life, as well as I, and many another!—Man, you are dying!”

“Dying!” he exclaimed, “dying!—I will not die! Send for the surgeon—he shall have gold to save me.—I will not—I cannot die!” and he

raised himself upon his elbow, as if he would have risen to fly from the fate that awaited him.

He fell back again the moment after, however, with a groan; and then, looking anxiously in the girl's face, he said, "Oh, save me—I cannot die—I will not die in this way! Send for a surgeon—see what can be done!"

"Nothing!" replied Kate. "If all the surgeons in England and France were here, they could do nothing for thee. The hand of death is upon thee, man!—The gangrene has begun. Thou shalt never rise from that bed again—thou shalt never feel the fresh air more—thou art no longer thine own—thou art Death's inheritance—thy body to the earth, thy spirit to God that gave it, there to render an account of all that thou hast done on earth.—Think not I deceive thee!—Ask thine own heart! Dost thou not feel that death is strong upon thee?"

"I do," groaned the man, covering his eyes with his hand. "Curses be upon my own folly for meddling with this scheme! Curses be upon that foul fiend, Dickon of Ashby, for bringing me into it, and leaving me here till it is too late

—till the gangrene has begun!—Curses upon him!—and may the lowest pit of hell seize him for his villany!”

“Spare your curses,” said Kate, “they can only bring down fresh ones upon your own head. Think upon yourself now, poor wretch!—think whether, even at this last hour, you may not yet do something to turn away the coming anger of God!”

“God!” cried the man—“shall I see God?—God who knows all things—who has beheld all I have done—who was near when——Oh! that is terrible—that is terrible, indeed!”

“It is terrible, but true,” replied Kate; “but there is hope, if thou wilt seek it.”

“Hope!” exclaimed the man, mistaking her—“hope! Did you not tell me I must die?”

“Ay, your body,” replied Kate, “’tis your soul that I would save. A thief obtained pardon on the cross. God’s mercy may be sued for till the last.”

“But how—how?” cried he, “I know naught of prayers and paternosters. ’Tis twenty years since, when a beardless stripling, I got absolu-

tion for stealing the King's game;—and what have I not done since? No, no, there is no hope! I must die as I have lived! God will not take off his curse for aught I can say now! If I could live, indeed, to undo what I have done—to fast, and pray, and do penance—then, in truth, there might be a chance.”

“There is still hope,” answered Kate—“thou hast still time to make a great atonement. Thou hast still time to save thy soul. God, as if by an especial mercy, has provided the means for you to cancel half your wickedness. I know all the tale: thou hast slain a poor old man, that never injured thee: but I tell thee that another is accused of his murder—an innocent man, who——”

“I know! I know!” cried Dighton, interrupting her, “’tis all his fiendish art!” And then, gazing in her face for a moment, he added, “but why talkest thou to me of repentance?—why preachest thou to me, girl, and dost not practise thine own preaching? Art not thou a sinner, too, as well as I am, ha?—and do not they tell us that the soft sins damn as surely as

the rough ones? Why dost thou not repent and make atonement?"

"I do," said Kate, firmly; "at this very hour I am aiming at nought else. Thinkest thou that I love that man? I tell thee that I hate him—that I abhor the very sight of his shadow, as it darkens the door—that the touch of his very hand is an abomination. But I abide with him still to frustrate his dark deeds—to protect those that are innocent from his fiendish devices—to give him to the arm of justice—and then to lay my own head in the grave, in the hope of God's mercy."

"But who tells thee thou shalt find it?" asked Dighton.

"God's word," replied Kate, "and a good priest of the holy church, both tell me that, if, sincerely repenting, I do my best to make up for all that I have done amiss—if, without fear and favour, I labour to defend the innocent even at the expense of the guilty, I shall surely obtain mercy myself in another world, though I wring my own heart in this."

"Did a priest say so?" demanded Dighton,

looking up, with a ray of hope breaking across his face—"send for that priest, good girl!—send for that priest!—quick! He may give me comfort!"

Kate paused for a moment, without reply, gazing down upon the ground, and then said, " 'Twould be hard to keep thee from the only hope of forgiveness, yet——"

" Yet what ?" exclaimed he, impatiently. " In God's name, woman, I adjure thee——"

" Wilt thou do what the priest bids thee do?" demanded Kate.

" Yes—yes!" cried he—" I will do all sorts of penance!"

" Even if he tells thee," continued Kate, " to make such a confession——"

" Ay, ay," said the man, " that's what I want—I want to confess."

" Nay, but," replied Kate Greenly, " not a mere confession to the ear of the priest, buried for ever under his vow, but such a confession as may save the innocent—as may bring the guilty to justice—as may declare who was the murderer, and who instigated the murder?"



“No,” cried the man, “I will not betray Ellerby. As to Richard de Ashby, if I could put a stone upon his head to sink him deeper into hell, I would do it,—but I wont betray my comrade.”

“Well, then,” said Kate Greenly, “you must even die as you have lived.—I can do nothing for you.”

“Get thee gone, then, harlot!” cried the man. “If thou art not a fiend, send me a priest!”

Kate Greenly’s eye flashed for a moment at the coarse name he gave her, and her cheek burnt; but the next instant she cast down her gaze again, murmuring, “It is true!” Then turning to the wounded man, she said, “I mind not thy harsh words; but it is needless for me to seek a man of God, unless thou wilt promise to do what I know he will require before he gives thee absolution. I promised to let no one see thee at all. To send for any one I must break my promise, and I will not do so for no purpose. Wilt thou do what the priest tells thee, even if it be to make public confession of who did that deed?”

“No,” cried the man, “I will not betray him! Get thee gone, if thou wilt!—Curses upon you all!”

Kate moved towards the door, but turned ere she went, and said, “I am in the chamber beneath! Think well what it is to go into the presence of God unrepenting and unabsolved—to meet all that thou hast injured, and all that thou hast slain, accusing thee at the high throne above, without the voice of a Saviour to plead for thee! Think of all this, I say; and if thy heart turn, and thou wilt resolve to do an act of atonement and repentance, strike on the ground with thy sword, it stands at thy bed head; and I will come to thee with the best physician that thou canst now have. One that can cure the wounds of the spirit.”

The man glared at her without reply, and Kate Greenly passed out, closing and locking the door. She paused at the stair-head, and clasped her hands, murmuring, “What shall I do?—He must not die without confession.—He must have consolation—Perhaps Father Mark might persuade him. But he will last till morning. ’Tis now near eight; I will wait awhile—

solitude is a great convincer of man's heart." And, descending the stairs, she entered the room below.

Half an hour passed without the least sound, and Kate sat gazing into the fire, unable to occupy herself with any indifferent thing. The time seemed long; she began to fear that the murderer would remain obdurate, and she had risen, thinking it would be better to send for Father Mark at once. She had scarcely taken three steps towards the door, however, when there was a stroke or two upon the floor above, and then the clanging fall of some piece of metal, as if the heavy sword had dropped from the weak hands of the wounded man.

Kate ran up with a quick foot, descended again in a few minutes, and, ere half an hour was over, a venerable man, with silver hair, was sitting by the bed of death; and Kate Greenly kneeling with paper before her, writing down the tale of Dighton's guilt from his own lips.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE King and Prince Edward stood in the great hall of Nottingham Castle, about to go forth on horseback. But few attendants, comparatively, were around them; and a good deal of unmeaning merriment was upon the King's countenance, as he jested with a horribly contorted hump-back, who, tricked forth in outrageous finery, displayed upon his own deformed person more ribands, feathers, and lace, than all the rest of the Court put together. Full of malice, wit, and impudence, every tale of scandal, every scurvy jest and ribald story of the Court, were familiar to him, and with these he entertained the leisure hours of the King, when the monarch was not seeking amusement in the society of his foreign favourites.

The brow of Edward, on the contrary, was somewhat stern and sad. Many things had gone contrary to his wishes ; his father seemed resolved not to perform any of the promises which he had made to the more patriotic noblemen who had supported the royal cause ; and though Edward carried filial respect and deference to an extent which his commanding mind, high purposes, and great achievements, might perhaps have justified him in stopping short of, yet he could not but suffer his countenance to show his disappointment and disapprobation.

The King had descended from his apartments before his horses had been brought into the court ; and when the door at the farther end of the hall opened, he took a few steps towards it, followed by the gentlemen who were with him, supposing that some of the attendants were coming to announce that all was ready.

Two or three of the royal officers did certainly appear, but in the midst was seen the tall and powerful form of Hugh de Monthermer, with an old knight, Sir John Hardy, on one side, and a page on the other. He advanced with a quick

step up the hall, and, bowing reverently to the King and to the Prince, he said—

“ I have come, your grace, according to the tenour of the safe conduct I have received, with one well known in feats of arms to be my godfather in chivalry, and with twenty-five attendants and no more, to meet my accuser face to face, to declare that his charge is false before God and man, and to do battle with him in this behalf—my body against his, according to the law of arms. I do beseech you, my lord, let me know my accuser.”

“ ’Tis I,” answered a voice from behind the King, and Alured de Ashby stepped forward to Henry’s side—“ ’tis I, Alured de Ashby, who do accuse you, Hugh of Monthermer, of feloniously and maliciously doing to death William de Ashby, my noble father. I put myself on the decision of Heaven, and God defend the right !”

Hugh of Monthermer had turned very pale. His lip quivered, his eye grew anxious and haggard, and for a moment or two he remained in deep silence. At length, however, he replied—

“ You do me bitter wrong, Alured de Ashby —you should know better.”

“ How so ?” demanded his opponent ; “ there is strong and dark suspicion against you.”

“ Which I can disperse in a moment,” said Hugh de Monthermer, “ like clouds scattered by a searching wind. But even were there suspicions ten times as strong, I say that you, of all men, should not receive them.”

“ How pale he turns !” observed one of the noblemen near, loud enough for Hugh to hear.

“ Ay, sir, I do turn pale,” replied the young nobleman, looking sternly at him ; “ I turn pale to find that one against whom I would less willingly draw the sword than any man living, is he, who, by a false and baseless suspicion, forces me to do so. Alured de Ashby, you knew right well when you concealed the name of my accuser that no provocation would induce me to dip my hand in the blood of your sister’s brother.”

“ I did,” replied Alured de Ashby ; “ that was the reason I concealed it.”

“ Then should you not have likewise known,”

demanded Hugh, "that the same reason which makes me shrink from injuring her brother, would still more withhold my arm, if raised, to spill the blood of her father. You know it, Alured de Ashby—in your heart you know it well. Nothing, so help me God, would have made me do one act to injure him, even if there had been quarrel or dispute between us, when, I call Heaven to witness, there was none."

"This is all vain," answered Alured de Ashby, with an unmoved countenance; "you, Hugh de Monthermer, underlie my challenge; you have accepted it, and I will make it good. There lies my glove!" and he cast it down before the King.

Sir John Hardy instantly advanced and took it up, saying, "In the name of the most noble lord Hugh de Monthermer, Baron of Amesbury, I take your gage, Alured, Earl of Ashby, and do promise on his behalf that he will do battle with you in this quarrel when and where the king shall appoint, on horse or foot, with the usual arms and equipments, according to the law of arms, and the customs of the court of England."



Hugh de Monthermer folded his arms on his chest, and bent down his eyes upon the ground ; and oh, how bitter were his feelings at that moment ! The deed was done—the irretrievable engagement was made ; he must either dip his hand in the kindred blood of her he loved best on earth, or he must abandon honour, and name, and station, for ever—ay, and remain stained with the imputation of a base and horrible act, which would equally put a barrier between him and the object of his long-cherished hopes.

Darkness was round him on every side. Between two black alternatives, both equally menacing and fearful, he could but go on upon the course before him—upon the course to which he seemed driven by fate. He must meet his accuser in arms, he must do battle with him at outrance, he must conquer, he must slay him. He knew well his own powers and his own skill, and he doubted not that he should obtain the victory ; but he also knew that Alured de Ashby was not one to be overthrown with ease, that he was not one whom he should be able to wound, disarm, or save. Once in the field together, it was

hand against hand, body against body, life against life, till one or the other was no more. Death was the only warder that would part them after the barrier of the lists fell behind him. Nor could he hesitate, nor could he spare his adversary, even though he were willing to risk or lose his own life rather than slay the brother of Lucy de Ashby ; for with the accused, ignominy, and condemnation followed overthrow, and it was not alone death, but disgrace, that was the mead of the vanquished. No ; his fate was sealed, his doom determined, with his own hand was he destined to destroy his own happiness, to tear the sweetest ties of the heart asunder, and to consign himself to grief, and disappointment, and solitude through life.

As the last words broke from the lip of Sir John Hardy, the scene around him seemed to disappear from his eyes. He felt like one of those, who, on some bitter sorrow, forswear the world and the world's joys for the dark cell of the monastery, the living tomb of the heart. He felt like one of them, when the vow is pronounced, when their fate is sealed, and when all earth's things

are given up for ever. The whole hall and all that it contained swam indistinctly before him, and he bent down his eyes lest their giddy vacancy should betray the intensity of his feelings to those who watched him.

In the meanwhile Henry and the Prince conferred for a moment apart; and the King turned first to the accuser, then to the accused, saying, "My lords, we will name Monday next for the decision of this wager of battle; the place to be the Butts by the side of Trent, below the bridge. We will take care that fitting lists be prepared; and, until the day of combat, we charge you both to keep the peace one towards the other, to live in tranquil amity, as noble knights and gallant gentlemen may do, although there be mortal quarrel between them, to be decided at a future time."

Thus speaking, the King turned to leave the hall, but Edward paused a moment, and took Hugh de Monthermer's hand. "I grieve, Hugh," he said, "most deeply that by some sad mistake—ay, and by some reckless conduct," he continued, aloud, "on the part of some gentle-

men of this court, a false and wrongful charge was brought against you in the first instance, out of which this second accusation has in some degree arisen. Of the first charge you have cleared yourself, to the satisfaction of the King and every honourable man; and of the second, I know you will clear yourself also as becomes you. In the meantime, you are my guest; one of the towers on the lower wall is prepared for you and your people, and as the day fixed is somewhat early for this trial, my armourer is at your command, to furnish you with such things as may be needful; for your own dwelling is too far distant to send for harness; and we know this gallant Earl too well," he added, turning towards Alured de Ashby, "not to feel sure that his opponent in the lists must use every caution and defence which the law of arms permits."

The young Earl smiled proudly, and followed the King, who, together with his son and the rest of the court, quitted the hall, leaving Hugh de Monthermer standing in the midst, paying but little attention to anything but his own sad thoughts.

“ My lord, I have charge to show you your apartments,” said an attendant, approaching with a simpering air. “ The tower is very convenient, but the stables are not quite so good, and you must put six of your horses in the town. This way, my lord, if you so please.”

Hugh de Monthermer followed in silence, and the man led him accordingly across the court to one of the towers, which stood as an independent building, only connected with the rest of the castle by the walls.

“ This, sir,” said the servant, entering with him, “ is the hall for your people, who will be supplied by the King’s purveyors with all they need. Here are two sleeping chambers behind, and here a chamber for this gallant knight. Now, up these steps, my lord—Here is a vacant room for you to range your arms, and see that all be well prepared for man and horse; here is a pinion for your hood and chapel-de-fer, here are stays for your lances, and nowhere will you find better wood than in Nottingham; a hook for your shield, and a block for the hauberk and other harness. This way is

the ante-room, my lord, with truckle-beds for a yeoman and a page. That door leads direct through the wall to the apartments of the Prince, and this to your bed-room."

Hugh gave him some money ; and, saying, " Largesse, my lord, largesse," the man withdrew, promising to send in the young nobleman's followers, and to show them where to stable their horses.

" Take heart, my lord—take heart," said Sir John Hardy, after the royal attendant was gone ; " this is a bitter change of adversaries, it is true ; but now 'tis done, it cannot be helped, and you must do your devoir against this Earl, who will bring his fate upon his own head."

" I thought him two hundred miles away," replied Hugh ; " but, as you say, I must do my devoir. See to all things necessary, Hardy ; for I have no heart to think of anything but one. A good plain harness is all I want : the horse that brought me hither will do as well as another."

" Nay, my lord, you must not be rash," answered the old Knight, " lest some misfortune happen."

“The worst misfortune that life has in store for me is sure to befall,” replied Hugh de Monthermer: “it is, to slay the brother of Lucy de Ashby, Hardy; for he fights with a desperate man, one to whom all things on earth are indifferent—who must live, though life be hateful to him—who cannot die, as he would fain do, lest ignominy should cleave unto his name. I will trust all to you, Hardy—I will trust all to you; but I cannot think or talk of anything at present, so I betake me to my chamber. If any one should come, tell them I am busy—busy enough, indeed, with dark and bitter fancies.”

Thus saying, he retreated to the bedroom which had been assigned him, and casting himself down on a settle, he spread his arms upon the table, and buried his eyes in them.

It were vain to attempt by any words of ours to depict the state of Hugh de Monthermer's heart, as he sat there, given up entirely to sad memories and gloomy expectations. Oh, how his thoughts warred with one another—how the idea of flying from the task he had undertaken

was met by the repugnance of an honourable spirit to disgrace and shame—how the image of Lucy de Ashby's brother dying beneath his blows, rose up before his sight, followed by the cold, averted look with which she would meet him ever after, the chilling tone of her voice, the shrinking horror of her demeanour, when she should see the destroyer of her nearest kinsman. Then came the thought of what if he were to avoid the combat?—What would be the consequences then? Would he not be considered recreant and coward?

The time allowed was so short, too—but three brief days—that there was no hope of gaining proof of his own innocence, and of the guilt of another, before the period appointed. A week, a fortnight—often more, was allotted for the preparation; but in this instance the time had been curtailed as there were evil tidings from the Isle of Axholme, which were likely to call Prince Edward speedily from Nottingham.

He could send, indeed, to the forest; he could even make inquiries in person, if he liked—for his safe-conduct specified that he was free



to come and go as he thought fit ; but he had been especially warned, that the proofs against Richard de Ashby could not be produced for at least a week, and his own eagerness to meet the charge had led him to the court much sooner than the judgment of his forest friends warranted. Thus, on every side he seemed shut in by difficulties, and nought was left him but to defend his innocence, to the utter extinction of all happiness for life.

“Would she could see me,” he thought; “would that she could see the agony which distracts my heart, at the very idea of raising my hand against her brother!—However that may be,” he continued, “that villain shall not escape. Although I cannot dare him to the field, now that I underlie the challenge of another, yet I will publicly accuse him before I enter the lists ; and, either by my lance or the hand of the executioner, he shall die the death he has deserved.”

He raised his head quickly and fiercely as he thus thought; the door opposite to him was slowly opening when he did so, and the face of Prince Edward appeared in the aperture.

“ I knocked,” said the Prince, “ but you did not answer.”

“ Forgive me, my gracious lord,” replied Hugh, rising, “ but my thoughts have been so sadly busy, that it would seem they close the doors of the ear lest they should be interrupted. I heard no one approach; but, God knows, your presence is the only thing that could give me comfort.”

“ This is a sad business, indeed,” said Edward, seating himself. “ Come, sit, Monthermer, and tell me how all this has happened.”

“ Good my lord, I know not,” replied Hugh. “ You must have more information than I have; for here, in this neighbourhood, has the plot been concerted. Here, in your father’s court, where they contrived to have me doomed to death some time since, untried, unheard, undefended—here have they, when frustrated in that, devised a new scheme for my destruction.”

“ Nay,” said Edward, “ it was not that I meant. I asked how it is you proposed this rash appeal to arms, when I expected that you would demand fair trial and judgment according to law?”

“I have been deceived, my lord,” replied Hugh—“terribly deceived! Even Lucy herself supposed that Richard de Ashby was my accuser, and I never knew that Alured had returned; otherwise, well aware of his quick and fiery spirit, I should have judged that he would make the quarrel his own, whether he believed the charge or not.”

“That Richard is the real accuser, there can be no doubt,” said the Prince. “His cousin is but a screen for his malice; but yet you were rash, Monthermer, and I know not now what can be done to help you.—Who is there that can prove where you were, and how employed, upon the day that this dark deed was done?”

“Outlaws and banished men—none else, my lord,” replied Hugh de Monthermer; “witnesses whose testimony cannot be given or received. But I will beseech you to let me know in what arises the suspicion that I had any share in this? I do not believe that there is a single act in all my life which could bring upon me even the doubt of such a crime.”

“The scheme has been well arranged,” an-

swered Edward; "the proofs are plausible and various—but you shall hear the whole;" and he proceeded to tell him all that the reader already knows concerning the accusation brought against him.

For a moment, Hugh remained silent, confounded, and surprised; but gradually his own clear mind, though for an instant bewildered by the case made out against him, seized on the clue of the dark labyrinth with which they had surrounded him.

"Well arranged, indeed, my lord," he replied, "but too complicated even for its own purpose. Villany never can arrive at the simplicity of truth. Was there no one, sir, who, even out of such grounds as these, could find matter to defend me?"

"Yes," answered Edward, "there was, and she was one you love. She stood forward to do you right—she swept away half of these suspicions from the minds even of your enemies—she showed that one half of the tale was false, the other more than doubtful."

"Dear, dear girl!" cried Hugh de Monther-

mer ; and, gazing earnestly in Edward's face, he asked, "and shall my hand spill her brother's blood?"

"Nay, more," continued the Prince, without replying to what the young Lord said, "she declared her belief that the real murderer had brought suspicion upon you to screen himself."

"The scheme, my lord, is deeper still," answered Hugh de Monthermer—"the scheme is deeper still, or I am very blind. Did this dear lady point at any one whom she believed the culprit?"

"She would not say," replied Edward, "she would not even hint, before the whole court, who was the object of her suspicions ; but since, in private, the Princess has drawn from her the secret of her doubts. We entertain the same.—Have you, too, any cause to fix upon the murderer?"

"Cause, my lord!" cried Hugh, "I know him as I know myself. I have no doubts. Mine are not suspicions. With me 'tis certainty, and full assurance.—Were it not a fine and well-digested scheme, my lord—supposing that be-

tween you and high fortune and the hand of the loveliest lady in the land, there stood a father and a brother and a lover—to slay the old man secretly, and instigate his son to charge the daughter's promised husband with the deed—to make them meet in arms, in the good hope that the lover's well-known lance would remove from your path the sole remaining obstacle, by drowning out, in her brother's blood, the last hope of his marriage with the lady? Thus, father, brother, lover would be all disposed of, the lands and lordship yours, and the lady almost at your mercy likewise. Do you understand me, my lord?"

"Well!" answered the Prince. "But who is the man?"

"Richard de Ashby, my lord; and, if the day named for this sad combat had not been so soon, I was promised evidence, within a week, which would have proved upon the traitor's head his cunning villany."

Edward mused, and turned in his mind the possibility of postponing the event. But—though it may seem strange to the reader that

such a state of things should ever have existed—a judicial combat of that day was a matter with which even so great and high-minded a prince as Edward I. dared not meddle as he would. We know how far such interference, at an after-period, contributed to lose his crown to Richard II.; and Edward saw no possibility of changing the day, or even hour, appointed for the trial by battle, unless some accidental circumstance were to occur which might afford a substantial motive for the alteration. Otherwise, he knew that he would have the whole chivalry of Europe crying out upon the deed; and that was a voice which even he durst not resist.

“ ’Tis unfortunate, indeed,” he said, “ most unfortunate; but my father having fixed it early, and at my request, too, it cannot be changed. But do you feel sure, quite sure, that within one week you could bring forward proofs to exculpate yourself, and to show the guilt of this wretched man?”

“ As surely as I live,” replied Hugh de Monthermer. “ I have the word of one who never failed me yet—of one who speaks not lightly, my good lord.”

“ And who is he ?” demanded Edward.

A faint smile came upon Hugh de Monthermer’s countenance. “ He is one of the King’s outlaws,” he answered ; but yet his word may be depended on.”

The Prince mused for a moment or two without reply, and then rejoined—“ It is probable these forest outlaws in our neighbourhood may know something of the matter. Think you they had any share in it ?”

“ What ! in the murder ?” cried Hugh de Monthermer. “ Oh, no, my lord. Would to God you had as honest men in Nottingham Castle as under the boughs of Sherwood !”

“ You are bitter, Hugh,” replied the Prince, and then added—“ I fear the day cannot be changed ; and all that remains to be done is, to send to these friends of yours as speedily as may be, bidding them give you, without delay, whatever proofs may be in their hands. ’Tis probable that other things may arise to strengthen our conviction. When we see what they can furnish us with, our course will be soon decided. If there be anything like fair evidence that Richard de Ashby has done this deed, I will stop the com-



bat, and proclaim his guilt; but unless I am sure, I must not pretend to do so, lest I bring upon myself the charge of base ingratitude. He it was, Hugh, who furnished me with the swift horse, whereon I fled from Hereford; and though I own that I would have chosen any other man in all England to aid in my deliverance rather than him, yet I must not show myself thankless. And 'tis but yesterday that I moved my father to give him the lands of Cottington as his reward."

"The very act, my lord," replied Hugh, "which merits your gratitude, was one of treachery to the party which he pretended to serve. For that I will not blame him, however; but he is a dark and deceitful man, and the proof can be made clear, I do not doubt. I will send instantly, as you direct. All that I gain in way of proof I will give into your hand, my lord, and let you rule and direct my conduct. It is so terrible a choice which lies before me, that my brain seems bewildered when I think of it."

"It is sad, indeed!" replied Edward. "I have put it to my heart, Monthermer, how I should act, were I placed as you are, and I know

how painful would be the decision. Whatever happens in the lists—whoever lives, whoever dies—you must be the loser. If you are vanquished—if, by a hesitating heart or unwilling hand, you give the victory to your adversary, you lose not only renown, but honour and esteem with all men; you lose not only life but reputation. If you conquer—if you win honour, and maintain your innocence—your love and happiness is gone for ever. 'Tis a hard fate, Monthermer; and whatever can be done to avert it shall be done by me;—but I must leave you now. You will of course be present at the King's supper. Bear, I beseech you, a calm and steady countenance, that your enemies may not triumph. Your accuser is gone back to Lindwell; and Edward's friend must not seem cast down."

Thus saying, he rose to quit the chamber; but before he went, he bent his head, adding, in a lower voice, "Doubtless you know your lady-love is here—ay, here, in Nottingham Castle, with the Princess Eleanor. Of course, in these days of mourning, she mingles not with the court; but if it be possible, I will contrive that you shall

see her. Methinks the laws of chivalry require it should be so."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Hugh, clasping his hands—"wherever she were, I would demand to see her; and no one bearing knightly sword and spur would venture to refuse me. Have I not to tell her how my heart is wrung?—Have I not to show her that this is no deed of mine?—Have I not to prove to her that I am but a passive instrument in the hands of fate?—that the death which he calls upon his head, is her brother's own seeking; and that I am no more answerable for it than the lance that strikes him?—Oh yes, my lord, I must see her!"

"You shall, you shall," replied Edward, "but it must not be to-night. Farewell, for the present;" and thus saying, he quitted the room.

## CHAPTER IX.

It was evening ; but one day remained to pass away before the arrival of that appointed for the wager of battle ; and all Nottingham had been in hurry and confusion with the excitement of the approaching spectacle. The residence of the King in the Castle had already filled the town fuller than it was ever known to be before ; but now a still greater influx of people poured into it from all the country round, to witness a transaction, which combined all the splendour and display of one of the military pageants of the day with the interest of a deep tragedy. The citizens had flocked out of the town during the morning, to see the preparation of the lists ; parties of pleasure

had been made to the spot where the deadly struggle was to take place ; and mirth and merriment had surrounded the scene, where two fellow-creatures were soon to appear armed for mutual destruction—where bright hopes and fair prospects were to be blighted, and death and sorrow to share the victory.

No tidings had been received by Hugh de Monthermer from his forest friends. No circumstance had transpired which could aid him in proving his innocence, or could fix the guilt upon another. Prince Edward was evidently anxious and uneasy ; and the only person who seemed pleased with the whole affair was the King himself, who, affecting a dignified grace and calmness, and declaring that he assumed the young Lord of Monthermer to be innocent till he was proved guilty, treated him with courtesy, and even with distinction. It was the pampering of a gladiator before sending him into the arena ; for the secret of Henry's good humour was, that he was pleased at the excitement, and satisfied with those who contributed to it.

Not to show favour, however—as one of

the most favourite-ridden monarchs that ever lived thought fit to term it, he sent expressly to invite the young Earl of Ashby to repair with his train to Nottingham Castle, and partake of the royal hospitality before the combat; and Alured had already arrived, and taken possession of the apartments prepared for him.

He had twice met with Hugh de Monthermer, once in the hall, when many others were present, and once in the court when they were nearly alone. Their meeting had been watched by the frivolous and malicious, always so numerous in courts, who hoped and expected to see some outburst of angry feeling, which might afford amusement for the passing hour. But in this they were altogether disappointed — the two adversaries saluted each other with grave courtesy; and it was particularly remarked, that Alured's fierce impetuosity and somewhat insolent pride were greatly softened down and moderated. Nay, more, when his eyes lighted upon Hugh de Monthermer, the expression was more sad than stern, and some thought that there was hesitation in it also.

“It is clear enough,” said Sir Harry Grey to

Sir William Geary—"it is clear enough, he doubts the truth of the charge he has made—he does not think the Monthermer guilty."

"He knows that some one must be guilty," answered the other, "and that is generally enough for an Ashby, to make him vent his rage upon the first thing near."

"But what has become of his good cousin Dickon?" demanded Grey. "I have not seen him all day, nor yesterday either."

"I suppose he keeps at Lindwell," replied Sir William Geary, "or else has gone to his new manor of Cottington. People look cold on him—I know not why."

"There are two or three reasons why," said Sir Harry Grey. "First, it is evident that this charge is of his hatching, and yet he puts the fighting part upon his cousin."

"And very wise, too!" exclaimed Sir William Geary. "First, because Hugh de Monthermer would break his neck, as a man does a rabbit's with his little finger; next, because there is but one between him and the Earldom of Ashby, and a good lance and a fair field is very likely to diminish the number."

“Is it just possible,” said Grey, “that he may have taken means to diminish the number already?”

Sir William Geary shrugged his shoulders significantly, but made no other answer, and the conversation dropped.

Such as it was, however, it was a fair specimen of many others that took place in Nottingham that day. But Richard de Ashby heard them not, for he was many miles away, deep in conference with his companion, Ellerby, who remained to watch the progress of events, hidden in the wild and mountainous parts of Derbyshire.

Nevertheless, that night towards seven o'clock, when every one in Nottingham had returned home from the sight-seeing and amusements of the day, and all was profoundly quiet, both in the castle and the town, two armourers, who sat burnishing a magnificent hauberk in the outer chamber of the young Earl of Ashby's apartments in Nottingham Castle, were interrupted by some one knocking at the door. In a loud voice they bade the visitor come in; and in a moment after, the brown face and head of an



old woman were thrust into the room, asking to see the Earl of Ashby.

The two men had been going on merrily with their work, giving no thought or heed to the bloody purposes which the weapons under their hands were to be applied to, nor of the danger that their lord ran, should that linked shirt of mail prove insufficient to repel the lance of an enemy. They looked up then as cheerfully as if the whole were a matter of sport, and one of them replied, "He will not receive you, good dame, seeing you are old and ugly. Had you been young and pretty, by my faith, you would have found admission right soon.—What is it that you wish?"

"I wish to tell him," answered the old woman, "that he is wanted immediately down at the house of Sir Richard de Ashby."

"Well—well," cried the man, "I will tell him. Get thee gone, and close the door after thee, for the night wind is cold."

Thus saying, he went on with his work, and seemed to have no inclination to break off, for the purpose of carrying any messages whatsoever.

“Come—come!” cried his companion, “you must tell my lord.”

“Pooh, that will do an hour hence,” he replied; “to-morrow morning will be time enough, if I like it. What should Richard de Ashby want with my lord?—Borrow money, I dare say. Some Jew has got him by the throat, and wont let him go. There let him stay—nasty vermin!”

“Nay—nay, then I will go,” said his brother armorer, rising, and proceeding into another chamber, where several yeomen and a page were sitting, to the latter of whom he delivered the message, and then returned to his work.

The young Earl of Ashby was seated in an inner room, with but one companion, when the old woman’s commission was at length executed.

“Ay! I am glad to hear he has returned,” he said, as the page closed the door. “I wonder he comes not hither! but I will go and speak with him. My mind misgives me, Sir Guy—my mind misgives me! And what you say does

not convince me. My sister knows better—Lucy is truth itself. Remember, sir, I have to swear that my quarrel is just—that I believe, so help me, God! that my charge is true. I doubt it, Guy de Margan—I doubt it. If you can give new proof—speak! But 'tis useless to repeat over and over again what I have heard before, and what has been refuted.”

“It may be that your cousin, my lord, can furnish you with new proof,” said Guy de Margan. “’Tis on that account, perhaps, he has sent for you.”

“I will go directly,” cried the Earl, starting up—“I will go directly!—But where does he live in Nottingham?—I thought he was in the castle with the rest, or at our lodging in the town.—Down at the house of Sir Richard de Ashby!—Where may that be, I wonder?”

“I can show you, my lord,” answered Guy de Margan—“’tis half-a-mile hence or more.”

“Tell me—tell me,” replied the Earl; “I will go by myself.”

“I will put you in the way, my lord,” said his companion, “and leave you when you are in

the street.—You will never find it by yourself.”

Giving him but little thanks for his courtesy, the young Earl strode into the ante-room; and with none but a page to carry his sword, and Guy de Margan by his side, issued forth into the court of the castle, and thence through the gates into the dark streets of Nottingham.

“Had you not better have a torch, my lord?” said Guy de Margan.

“No—no,” replied the Earl, “’tis but that our eyes are not accustomed to the obscurity. We have no time to wait for torches; the hour of supper will be here anon.”

“Down the first flight of steps, my lord,” said Guy de Margan, “let us not miss the mouth of the alley—Oh, ’tis here!” and hurrying on with a quick step, the two gentlemen and their young attendant descended to the lower part of the town, and entered the street in which Richard de Ashby had hired the house we have so often mentioned.

When they had proceeded some way down it, the young Earl asked, with even more

than his usual impatience—"Are we not near it yet?"

"Yes, my good lord," replied Guy de Margan; "you can now find it for yourself, I doubt not. 'Tis the first small house standing back between two large ones, with eaves shooting far over into the street."

"I shall find it!—I shall find it!" cried Alured de Ashby. "Good night, and thanks, Sir Guy. We shall meet again to-morrow."

With this short adieu, he took his way forward, and in his quick, impetuous haste, had well nigh passed the house which he was seeking, but the boy pulled him by the sleeve, saying, "This must be it, my lord;" and looking round, he plunged into the dark, retreating nook in which it stood, and feeling for the door, struck sharply upon it with the hilt of his dagger.

For near a minute there was no sound, and the young Earl was about to knock again, when a light, shining through the chinks, shewed him that somebody was coming. He drew back a step; and a moment after, the door was opened

with a slow and deliberate hand, which suited ill with the young nobleman's impatient mood. The sight that he beheld, however, when his eyes recovered from the first glare of the light, struck him with surprise, and calmed him also, by the effect of gentler feelings than those which had lately agitated his bosom.

It was the form of fair Kate Greenly that presented itself—it was her face that the rays of the lamp shone upon; but oh, what a change had been wrought in that face, even within the last three days! Still more terrible was the alteration since the Earl had last seen it, when he jested for a moment with his cousin's leman some months before in Hereford. Then it had been bright and blooming, full of life and eagerness, with much of the loveliness which then characterized it depending upon youth and high health. Now, though beauty still lingered, and the fine line of the features could not be altered, yet the face was sharp and pale and worn, the lips bloodless; and the bright, dark eyes, though shining, with almost preternatural lustre, had a fixed, stern look, no longer wild

and sparkling, but full of intense thought, and strong, yet painful purpose. The form, too, seemed shrunk and changed; the grace indeed remained, but the rounded contour of the limbs was withered and gone.

“Why, Kate,” exclaimed the Earl—“why how now—what is this? You seem ill.”

“I seem what I am, my lord,” replied Kate Greenly. “I am glad you are come; your presence is much wanted.”

“Where?” demanded the Earl. “What do you mean, my poor girl? Some new mishap, I warrant you. Where is my presence wanted, Kate?”

“I will show you, my lord,” replied Kate Greenly, “if you will follow me;” and she led the way up the stairs.

At the end of the first flight, the Earl paused, saying, “Is not Dickon here, that he comes not forth?”

Kate gave him no direct answer, merely replying, “This way, my lord—this way, sir.”

“He must be ill,” thought the Earl, “and she, too, is ill, that is clear. ’Tis some fever, be-

like. I have heard there is one in Nottingham.”

At the top of the next flight, the girl laid her hand upon the latch of a rough door, formed of unsmoothed wood, holding the lamp so as to give the Earl light in his ascent. The moment after, she opened the door and entered, leading the way towards the foot of a small bed, by which was burning a waxen taper.

The Earl followed, murmuring, “This is a poor place,” but raised his eyes as he approached the foot of the bed, and, to his surprise, beheld the ghastly face of a dead man, stretched out, with a sprig of holly resting on his breast.

“Good Heaven!” he exclaimed.—“Who is this?”

“The murderer of your father!” replied Kate Greenly, without adding a word more.

Alured de Ashby clasped his hands, with deep and terrible emotion. His mind at the moment paused not to inquire whether the tale were true or false; but flashing at once through his heart and brain came the feeling of wrath, even at the inanimate mass before him, for the deed



that had been done, mingled with grief and anxiety at having charged it upon another, and the memory of all the embarrassments which that charge must produce.

“The murderer of my father!” he said. “The murderer of my father!—Is that the murderer of my father?—Then Monthermer is innocent!”

“As innocent as yourself,” replied Kate Greenly. “This is one of those who did the deed; but there were more than one. Hugh de Monthermer, however, was many a mile away, and there lies the man who struck the first blow. Look here!” she cried, and partly drawing down the sheet, she pointed to the wound upon the dead man’s breast, saying, “There entered your father’s sword; for the old man died gallantly, and sent one at least to his account.”

“Ay, I remember,” replied the Earl, thoughtfully, “they found his sword naked and bloody.—But how is this?” he continued, turning towards Kate, and gazing on her face. “You seem to know it all, as if you had been present.—Now I perceive what makes you haggard and pale.”

“’Tis seeing such sights as this,” replied Kate Greenly—“ay, and many another sad cause besides. But you ask, how I know all this? I will tell you, Earl of Ashby: by taking down from that man’s own lips, in his dying moments, the confession of his crime. The priest adjured him to make full avowal of the truth, not only to the ear of the confessor, which could but benefit his own soul, but for the ear of justice, that the innocent might not be punished for the guilty. Such confession as he did make, I myself wrote down, he signed it with his dying hand, and I and Father Mark were the witnesses thereunto. Here is the paper—read and satisfy yourself! The priest I have sent for—he will soon be here.”

Alured de Ashby took the paper, and, by the light of the lamp held by Kate Greenly, read the few words that it contained:—

“I do publicly acknowledge and confess,” so ran the writing, which followed exactly the broken words of the dying man; “that I, Ingelram Dighton, did, on the afternoon of Tuesday last, together with three others—no, I will not mention their names—who had

come down with me the day before from the good city of London, lay wait for the Earl of Ashby, at a place called the Bull's Hawthorn. I struck at him first, but only wounded him; whereupon he drew his sword and plunged it into my side, from which I am now dying. The Lord have mercy upon my soul! El——, but no, I will not mention his name—another man then stabbed him behind, and we threw him into the pit. The Lord Hugh de Monthermer had nothing to do with the deed. We used his name, because the person that set us on wanted the charge to fall on him, and a letter was written, as if from him, asking the old Earl to see him alone, at the place of the murder; but he never wrote it, or knew of it. I have never seen him or spoken to him in my life, but only heard that morning that he had escaped from prison. This has been read over to me now dying, at the house of Sir Richard de Ashby; and I swear by the Holy Sacrament and all the Saints, that it is true, so help me God!"

It was signed, with a shaking hand, "Ingel-

ram Dighton," and below were the names of Kate Greenly and the priest, as witnesses.

The young Earl read and re-read it, and then looking upon his companion somewhat sternly, he asked, "Why did you not produce this before?"

"For many reasons," replied Kate Greenly, calmly:—"first, because I had not the means. Do you suppose that the cruel and deceitful villain into whose power I have fallen leaves me to roam whither I please? 'Tis but when he is absent that I dare quit the house. In the next place, you were at Lindwell; and in the next, I wished, ere I brought forward even so much as this, to have the whole in my hands; to be able not only to say, 'This man is innocent,' but also, 'That man is guilty!' I tell you, Earl, I would not now have told you what I have, but that you must not risk your own life in a false quarrel, nor bring upon yourself the guilt of slaying another for deeds that he did not commit. Knowing as much as you do now know, it is your task and duty to sift this matter to the bottom, and to discover the instigator of this mur-

der; for he who now lies there, and his companions, were but tools. I am ready and willing to speak all I know, when the time and place is fitting. Yet you must be neither too quick nor too slow: for if you are slow, I shall not be here—my days are numbered, and are flying fast; and if you are hasty, the guilty one will escape you.”

“And who is the guilty one?” demanded Alured de Ashby, bending his brows sternly upon her—“Who is the guilty one? Name him, girl, I adjure thee—name him! Name him, if ever thou hast had the feelings of a child towards a father!”

Kate gave a low cry, as if from corporeal pain, and then, shaking her head mournfully, she said, “I have had the feelings of a child towards a father, Earl of Ashby; and for the sake of your false cousin, I tore those feelings from my heart in spite of all the agony—for his sake, I brought disgrace upon that father’s house—for his sake, I strewed ashes upon a parent’s head—for his sake, I poured coals of fire upon my own; and how has he repaid me! But you ask me, who is the man? I will not be his accuser till

all other means fail. I must not be accuser and witness too. You have the clue in your hands; use it wisely and firmly, and you will soon discover all you seek to know."

The Earl gazed in her face for a minute with a keen and searching glance, then turned his look once more upon the corpse, took a step or two nearer, and examined the features attentively.

"Give me the lamp," he said; and taking it from her hand, he bent down his own head, and seemed to scan every lineament, as if to fix them on his mind for ever. But his thoughts were in reality turning to the past, not the future; and raising himself to his full height again, he added, aloud, "I have seen that face before, though where I cannot tell. The memory will return, however. How came he here?—Who brought him here to die?"

"Those who took him hence to slay," answered Kate Greenly.

"Didst thou ever see him before that day?" demanded the Earl.

"Twice," was the reply.

"Hark! there is the curfew," exclaimed the Earl. "I must away."

“Stay till the priest comes!” cried Kate, eagerly. “He will be here ere long.”

“I cannot,” answered Alured de Ashby; “I am expected at the castle even now. But fear not that I will forget this business. I will find out the truth, even if I have to cut it from the hearts of those that would conceal it; and I will be calm, too—tranquil, and calm, and cautious.”

“Go, then!” said Kate. “Yet tell me—But no, you will not dream of it!—You have no thought of meeting in arms an innocent and blameless man upon a false and unholy charge? Promise me—promise me!”

“I will make no promise!” answered the Earl. “You seem to feel some deep interest in this Monthermer?”

“I never saw his face but twice!” replied Kate, solemnly. “I never heard his voice but once—I have no interest in him; but, weak and fallen and disgraced as I am, I have still an interest in right and truth! Neither would I see you fall before his lance—for fall assuredly you will, if you go forth to meet him! Nay, look

not proud, Earl of Ashby, before a dying girl, who knows nought of these haughty strifes, and can little tell whether you or he—if all were equal—would bear away the prize of chivalry. But, I say, all is not equal between you; and if you meet Hugh de Monthermer, you fall before his lance as sure as you now live: for he is armoured in high innocence, with a just quarrel, and an honest name to vindicate; you fight, weighed down with the consciousness of wrong upon your arm, a false oath upon your lips, and doubt and discouragement at your heart! Were you twenty times the knight you are, that burden were enough to make you fall before a peasant's staff! One thing, however, I have a right to demand: you shall give that paper to Prince Edward, fully twelve hours before you go into the lists—this you must promise me to do, or I myself will go and cast myself——”

“I have no right to refuse,” interrupted the Earl; “on my honour, as a knight, the Prince shall have the paper. Be you ready to prove that it is genuine?”



“ I am ever ready,” answered Kate ; “ and though I may shrink and quiver, like a wounded limb when a surgeon draws the arrow forth, yet I shall be glad when each step of my bitter task is begun, and the time of rest comes nearer. If they wish to remove this body ?”—she added, as the Earl walked towards the door.

“ Let them do it,” answered Alured—“ let them do it—they shall be watched !”

Thus saying, he left the room, and slowly descended the stairs, Kate Greenly lighting him down to the bottom. He went thoughtfully and sadly, with a heart full of gloom, anxiety, and strife ; but there were kindly parts in his character, too ; and when he reached the bottom step, he turned and looked once more in the face of his unhappy companion. Then, taking her hand, he said, “ Poor girl, I am sorry for thee ! Can nought be done to save thee ?”

“ Nothing, my lord !” replied Kate Greenly, calmly ; “ I have but one Saviour, and he is not of earth.”

## CHAPTER X.

“THE King has sat down to supper, my good lord,” said one of the young Earl’s attendants, meeting him at the door of his apartments, “and wondered that you were not there. A seat is kept for you, however.”

“Is it near the Prince?” demanded Alured.

“Nay, my lord, the Prince is gone,” replied the man; “did you not know it?”

“Gone!” exclaimed the young nobleman.

“Gone, whither?”

“To Leicester, my lord,” said the servant.

“While you and Sir Guy de Margan were conversing here, news came from Leicester of a revolt amongst the peasants there; and the Prince set out at once, with some fifty men—’tis not half an hour since.”

“ Why, he is to be the judge of the field the day after to-morrow !” cried the Earl, in surprise and evident disappointment.

“ I heard him tell the King myself, my lord,” replied the man, “ that he would be back ere sunset to-morrow.”

“ This is unfortunate,” murmured Alured— “ this is most unfortunate ; but it can't be helped !” and after making some slight change in his apparel, and giving some orders in a low but earnest voice, he hastened to the hall. Henry, as soon as he appeared, greeted him with light merriment, saying, “ You are late for the banquet, noble Earl ; but we forgive you, as we doubt not some fair lady held you in chains of dalliance not to be broken.”

“ Nay, sire,” replied the Earl, gravely, “ my heart is too full of other things to think of levities. I was with a sick friend, and the time, though it passed heavily, was not noted.”

“ A sick friend is as good an excuse as a fair lady,” said the King, “ and one that may be pleaded at all times.”

“ Nay, sire,” replied Mortimer, who was

sitting near, "neither fair lady nor sick friend can be a moment's excuse for delay in day of battle, or even, I hold, of tournament."

"A high question of chivalry," replied the King. "Let some of our old knights decide it. What say you, Sir John Hardy?"

"That the matter has been decided often, my liege," said the old soldier, who was placed some way down the table, and who spoke with grave deliberation on a subject which he considered all-important. "No excuse on earth can be received for the man who has touched a challenger's shield, or taken an accuser's glove, or received his leader's command to prepare for battle, if he be more than a quarter of an hour behind the time appointed. That space is given in case of accident, or men's judgment differing as to time. Thus the trumpets may sound thrice, with five minutes between each blast; but if he comes not at the third call, he is held coward and recreant by all civilized men, and can plead nothing, unless it be the commands of his sovereign, as his excuse."

"The honour of a knight," said another

old soldier, in an authoritative and somewhat pedantic tone, "should be as bright as his shield, as clear and cutting as his sword, and as pointed and steady as his lance. What he has once asserted, that he should maintain to the death; for whatever cause there may be for retracting, an imputation on his courage will still lie, if he make a moment delay in meeting an enemy in the field."

Hugh de Monthermer remained calm and pale, but the cheek of Alured de Ashby flushed as if every word he heard was fire. As soon as possible after the banquet, he quitted the hall and sought his apartments, with a hurried and irregular step.

He found the armourers still busy in their task, as he passed through the outer chamber; and, pausing at the bench where they were working, he gazed down upon the weapons under their hands with a thoughtful but abstracted look. Then, with a sudden start, clenching his hand tight, he said, "See that all be firm and strong, Mapleton, yet not too heavy."

"Fear not, my lord—fear not," replied the armourer, "there never was better steel in all the

world; and these poylins are a rare invention for the defence of the elbows and knees. I have prepared a garland, too, my lord, for your neck. I know you love it not, but 'tis much safer, if you will but wear it, though it does spoil the look of the hauberk, it must be confessed. But very often I have known the blow of a lance right in the throat kill or disable a knight, though the spear went not through the rings—'tis a trick with the Lord Hugh, too, I hear, to aim at the throat. They say he killed two men so at Evesham, and the Soldan of Egypt's brother, when he was in Paynimrie."

Alured de Ashby had long ceased to listen; but with his brow bent and his eyes fixed upon the arms, he stood thinking of other things, till the armourer ceased and looked up in his face; and then, turning away, he quitted the room without any reply. When in his own chamber, he closed the door, and for nearly two hours his foot might be heard, walking to and fro, sometimes, indeed, pausing for a minute or two, but still resuming its heavy tread.

Who can depict all the stormy passions that agitated him at that moment—the struggle that

was taking place in his bosom, so different from that which had torn the heart of Hugh de Monthermer, though as violent in its degree, and proceeding from the same events. To fight in an unrighteous quarrel!—to go, solemnly appealing to Heaven for the justice of his cause, and to feel that that cause was unjust!—deliberately to persist in charging an innocent man with a horrible crime, of which he knew him to be innocent!—It was a fearful contemplation for one in whom conscience had not been smothered under many evil deeds, notwithstanding the faults and follies which sometimes blinded his eyes to right and wrong. But yet, to retract the accusation he had made—to acknowledge that he had erred—to own that he had been rash and weak—to see Hugh de Monthermer triumph—all this was repugnant to the most powerful vices of his character—to jealous pride and irritable vanity.

Nevertheless, this he might have overcome; for, as we have shown, there was a high sense of honour in his nature, and the voice of conscience was strong enough, when the question was one of such mighty moment, to overpower the busy

tongue of passion, and lead him to what was right; but, alas! there was another consideration. He feared the loss of renown! The very suspicion of any dread of his adversary was enough to put every good resolution to flight; and, unhappily, the laws of chivalry opposed a barrier to his pursuing the only course of rectitude, which would have been difficult enough to surmount even had his natural disposition been different from what it was.

Then came back the remembrance of the conversation which had taken place at the banquet. It seemed to him as if the two old knights, who had declared the rules of arms, had been sitting in judgment on the cause pleaded by the disputants in his own bosom. They had pronounced against the voice of conscience—they had given sentence in favour of that fantastic honour which was based more on personal courage than on truth. Good Heaven! he thought, that the world should suspect he was afraid to meet in arms the man he had accused! That *he* should fear Hugh de Monthermer—that *he* should take advantage of any new risen doubt to withdraw a charge which he had



solemnly made, and shrink from a combat which he had himself provoked! How would men jeer at his name—how silent would the heralds stand, when he entered the court or the tilt-yard? He pictured to himself a thousand imaginary insults:—he saw knights refusing to break a lance with one who had shrunk from the wager of battle he had demanded; he saw ladies turning away their heads in scorn from the craven knight who had feared to meet an equal in the field. He could not—he would not do it!—and yet conscience still cried aloud; ay, and the voice of Kate Greenly rang in his ears, telling him that conscience was powerful to overthrow as well as to admonish; prophesying to him that he would fall before the lance of the man he knowingly injured, and that shame and defeat, as well as injustice and falsehood, would be his companions on that fatal field.

“Foul befall the girl!” he cried, “for putting such thoughts into my head; they hang upon me like a spell—they will cling to me in the hour of battle. Many a man has fought in an unjust cause—ay, and many a one has fallen. In this ordeal, is the judgment of God shown,

or is it not? Is it possible to conceive that we can appeal to Him, and call upon Him to defend the right, and solemnly swear that our cause is just, all the time having a lie upon our lips, and that He will not punish? He were worse than the God of the Moslemah, if he did not. What then shall I gain? For the first time in life, I shall soil my soul with an untruth—I shall take a false oath—I shall be defeated, disgraced, with the judgment of God pronouncing that I am perjured, and die, leaving a stained and blackened name behind.—And yet, to withdraw the charge is impossible!” he continued. — “Better disgraced, and hide me from contumely in the grave, than live and meet the scornful looks of every knight in Europe! My only chance is in the Prince—perhaps he may stop it. Would he were here!—I would give him the paper now! Yet I must show no desire to recant the accusation. I remember how his proud lip curled when that braggart, De Poix, slunk from the *mélée* at the Northampton tournament, on pretence that his horse was lame. Curses on my own precipitate haste!—but still deeper curses on that traitor, Richard, who

urged me on!—Would I could know the truth.—Oh! if I thought that it was so, I would tear his heart from his body, and trample it quivering in the dust.—The foul villain!—And my father so good to him!”

Such were some of the broken and disjointed thoughts which crossed the mind of Alured de Ashby, and from them the reader may form some idea of the agitated state of his feelings during that night. He slept scarcely at all till morning; but he then fell into a deep slumber, which lasted several hours, and from which he rose refreshed and calmer, but, nevertheless, stern and sad. He was restless, too, and the hesitating and undecided state of his mind on the most pressing subject before him, rendered him wavering in all his actions.

In the morning, several of his servants, who had been out all night, according to orders he had given them, came in to make their report, and informed him, that though they had watched steadily at the spot which he had pointed out, no one had come out of the house but a priest and a little boy bearing a torch. He

then sent for some of the old retainers of the family, who had been at Lindwell when his father was slain, and on their arrival questioned them minutely on many points; and then he told his people that he was going to the apartments of his sister; but, when he came to the foot of the stairs, he paused, turned back again, and strode up and down the court for half an hour.

His next proceeding was to order his horses instantly, and he set out the road to Leicester. When he was about halfway there, however, he turned his charger's head, and reached the gates of Nottingham just as night was falling. The city warder told him, in answer to his questions, that the Prince had not returned, but that a messenger from him had arrived an hour before, and it was rumoured that Edward would not be back until the following morning.

The Earl shook the bridle of his horse fiercely, and galloped up to the castle. Before he reached it, however, the fit of angry impatience had passed away; and on dismounting, he proceeded direct to the apartments of the Prince, and sent in a page to say he wished to see

the Lady Lucy. He was instantly admitted to her chamber, where the sight of her fair face, bearing evident marks of tears, and full of deep and inconsolable sorrow, shook his purposes again, and added to all the bitterness of his feelings.

Alured kissed her tenderly, but he perceived that though she uttered not a word of reproach, she shrunk from him, and that was reproach enough. At his desire she sent away her maids, and then, sitting down beside her, he took her hand in his, saying, "Lucy, I have come to see you—perhaps for the last time!"

She cast down her eyes, and made no reply, and he went on—"It is not fit, Lucy, that you and I should part with one cold feeling between us; and I come to ask forgiveness for any pain that I have caused you throughout life."

"Oh, Alured!" exclaimed Lucy, "the last and most dreadful pain may yet be avoided; but I know your stern and unchangeable heart too well to hope. You cannot but feel how horrible it is to see my brother and my promised husband armed against each other's life—meet-

ing in lists, from which one or the other must be borne a corpse. You cannot but know, Alured, that to me the misery is the same, whichever is the victor—that I have nothing to hope—that I have nothing to look for. If Hugh de Monthermer is vanquished, my brother is the murderer of him I love.—Ay, murderer, Alured!” she added, solemnly; “for you are well aware, that in your heart you believe him innocent. If you fall before Hugh de Monthermer’s lance, the man I love becomes the butcher of my brother, and I can never see his face again.”

“Stay, Lucy, stay,” said the Earl; “it is on this account that I have come to you. I have had much and bitter thought, Lucy. Hugh de Monthermer may be innocent—God only knows the heart of man, and he will decide; but if I die in the lists to-morrow, and he you love is proved to be innocent of my father’s death, let my blood rest upon my own head; hold him guiltless of my fate, and wed him as if Alured de Ashby had not been.”

“Oh, Alured!” cried Lucy, touched to the heart, casting her arms around him, at the same

time, and weeping on his bosom. “No—no! that can never be.”

“Yes, but it must, and shall be!” replied her brother. “I will not do you wrong, Lucy, in my dying hour. Here I have put down in a few brief words my resolution and my wishes. Read, Lucy.—What! your eyes are dim with tears!—Well, I will read it. Mark!—‘I, Alured de Ashby, about to do battle with the Lord Hugh de Monthermer, to whom the hand of my sister Lucy was promised by my father before his decease—having lately had some cause to doubt the truth of the charge which I have brought against the said lord, of having compassed the death of my father—do hereby give my consent to the marriage of my sister with the said Hugh de Monthermer, if at any time he can prove fully, and clearly, that he is innocent of the deed; and I do beseech my sister—entreat, and require her, in that case, to give her hand to Hugh de Monthermer, whatever may have taken place between him and myself.’—There, girl—keep that paper, and use it when thou wilt.—Now, art thou contented?”

“Contented, Alured!” cried Lucy, looking

reproachfully in his face—"contented! Do you think I can be contented, to know that either he or you must die? What you take from one scale you cast into the other. If my heart can be lightened respecting him by this generous act, how much more heavy the grief and terror that I feel for you. Oh! Alured, you say, that you now doubt his guilt. Why not boldly, and at once, express that doubt?—Why not——"

"My honour, child—my honour, and renown!" cried Alured de Ashby. "But you will unman me, Lucy. Here, give this sealed packet to the Prince whenever he returns."

"Perhaps he has returned," said Lucy—"the Princess told me he would be back ere nightfall."

"He has changed his purpose," replied her brother, "and will not be in Nottingham till to-morrow."

"Alas! alas!" exclaimed Lucy, "that is unfortunate."

"It cannot be helped!" answered the young Earl—"but give it to the Prince whenever he comes. Tell him, that therein are contained the proofs which have lately made me doubt the



justice of my charge against Monthermer.—He must act as he thinks fit regarding them. But, remember, Lucy, that if I fall, and you become Monthermer's wife, he takes the retribution of blood upon him, and must pursue the murderers of our father till he approve their guilt upon them, and give them up to death.—And now, girl, fare thee well!"

"Nay, Alured!" she cried, clinging to him. "Listen to me yet one word. If you be so doubtful, can you swear——"

"Hush—hush!" he answered. "My mind is now made up beyond all alteration. I will do everything to clear me before God, and make my conscience easy; but I must never shrink from battle—I must never sully my renown—I must never bear the name of coward, or know that one man suspects I am such.—Farewell, Lucy, farewell—not one word more!" and kissing her tenderly, he unclasped the clinging arms that would have held him, and left her chamber.

For a moment, Lucy covered her eyes and wept, but the next instant, clasping her hands together, she cried, "I will go to Hugh, and will

beseech him! He is more tender; he has more trust in his own great renown. The victor at Damietta, the conqueror of the lists at Sidon, need fear no injurious suspicion. I will go to him. I will entreat him on my knees.—But first to the Princess, with this packet. She must give it to her husband.—What does it contain, I wonder?”

Lucy gazed at it for a moment, and then at the other paper which her brother had given her. Suddenly a light like that of joy broke upon her face, and she exclaimed, “He will! he will!—Why should I fear? why should I doubt? He told me himself that in seven days he could prove his innocence.—He will, he will!—and with this before me, I need fear no shame. But now to the Princess.” And with a quick step she hurried to the apartments of Eleanor, whom, for once, she found alone.

She was too deeply agitated for courtly ceremony; and gliding in, she approached the Princess as she sat reading, and knelt on the cushion at her feet.

“What is it, my poor Lucy?” said the

Princess, bending down her head, and kissing her fair forehead, with a look of tender compassion ; “ there seems some happiness mingled with the sorrow of your look.”

“ ’Tis that I have hope !” replied Lucy ; and with rapid but with low words she related all that had passed between her brother and herself. She then put the packet into Eleanor’s hands, saying, “ It will prove his innocence, I am sure ; but the Prince is absent, and I am afraid you will not open it.”

“ Nay,” answered Eleanor, “ I must not venture on such an act as that. I am only bold where it is to show my love for him, but not to meddle in matters of which he alone can judge. Neither is there occasion here, my Lucy ; he will be back ere long.”

“ But Alured thought not,” replied her fair companion. “ He had heard that the Prince’s journey from Leicester was put off till to-morrow morning.”

“ Not so, not so !” cried the Princess ; “ ’twas but delayed for an hour or two, and he sent lest I should fear the rebels had detained him. I expect him each minute, Lucy. But, in the

meantime, tell me more clearly what caused that look of joy just now?"

Lucy hesitated. " 'Twas that a hope has crossed my mind," she said—" a hope that I might yet save them both ; and surely, lady," she continued, raising her soft, dark eyes to Eleanor's face—" and surely to save both the life of a brother and a lover ; to spare them deeds that can never be atoned ; to shield Alured, not only from Monthermer's lance, but from the more terrible fate of going to his God with a false charge upon his lips—a charge which he knows to be false,—a woman may well put on a boldness she would otherwise shrink from—ay, and do things which maiden modesty would forbid, were not the cause so great and overpowering."

" Certainly," rejoined Eleanor, " so long as virtue and religion say not nay."

" God forbid that I should sin against either !" replied Lucy, eagerly. " That could never be, lady!—But there be small forms, and prudent cautions, reserves, and cold proprieties, which, in the ordinary intercourse of life, are near akin to virtues, though separate. These surely may be laid aside, when the matter is to rescue from

crime, from death, or from disgrace, beings so much beloved as these?"

"Assuredly!" exclaimed Eleanor, "who can doubt it? To save my Edward, what should stand in my way? Nothing but that honour which I know he values more than all earthly things, or even life itself."

"Thanks, lady, thanks!" cried Lucy; "you confirm me in my purpose."

"But what is your purpose, my sweet cousin?" asked the Princess. "I do not yet comprehend you."

"Will you promise me," said Lucy, "that if I tell, you will let me have my will; that you will put no bar or hindrance in my way, nor inform any one of my scheme, but with my leave."

Eleanor smiled. "I may well promise that," she answered, "for if you please, you may conceal your scheme, and then I am powerless. No bar or hindrance will I place, dear Lucy, but kind remonstrances, if I think you wrong. What is this plan of yours?"

"This, this!" cried Lucy. "Here on this paper has my brother written down that he doubts Hugh de Monthermer's guilt; that he so much

doubts the truth of the charge which he himself has made, as to require his sister to overlook the shedding of his blood, and unite her fate with the man who slays him, if he should fall in those fatal lists.—Nay, lady, look you here; he puts no condition, but that Hugh de Monthermer should prove his innocence.”

“Well,” said Eleanor, “I see he is kind and generous, and evidently believes the charge was rashly made, and is not just.”

“Yet nought will keep him,” replied Lucy, “from sustaining that charge to-morrow at the lance’s point, although he knows it to be false. Tears, prayers, entreaties, appeals to conscience and to honour, are all in vain with him: he will die, but yield no jot of what he thinks his fame requires. He would not withdraw the accusation if an angel told him it were untrue. But Hugh is not so stern and cruel, lady; he will listen to reason and to right. He told me himself that he would have laid down his battle hand, would but the King have named a few days later; for he is as sure as of his own life, to prove the guilt upon another man. Oh, lady! in that long, sad interview, he was as much shaken as I, a poor weak

girl. Yet what could I say, what could I do, so long as my brother maintained the charge in all its virulence? Now, however, now I will hie to him—ay, lady,” she continued, “even to his chamber! I will beseech him, for mercy’s sake, for my sake, for our love’s sake, to avoid this unholy encounter; for the peace, for the comfort throughout life of the lady that he loves, to quit this place ere morning’s dawn to-morrow.”

“He will not do it,” answered Eleanor, sadly; “you will but wring his heart, and break your own.—He will not do it.”

“I will soften him with my tears!” said Lucy, vehemently, “I will kneel to him on the ground; I will cover his hand with my kisses and water it with my eyes—”

Eleanor shook her head.

“I will offer to go with him!” said Lucy, in a low and thrilling tone, fixing her eyes, with a look of doubt and inquiry, on the Princess’s face.

“Ha!” cried Eleanor, starting, while, for a moment, the colour mounted into her cheek. But the next instant she cast her arms round Lucy, and bent her head towards her with a smile, saying—“And thou wilt conquer!—Dear,

devoted girl, I dare not altogether approve and sanction what you do ; yet, I will add, hard were the heart, and discourteous were the lip, to blame thee. The object is a mighty one ; no common means will reach it ; and, surely, if thou dost succeed in saving thy brother both from a great crime and a great danger, and proving thy lover innocent, without risking his renown, thou shalt deserve high praise and honour, and no censure, even in this foul-tongued world in which we live. But stay yet awhile, Edward will soon be here, and perchance this letter itself may render the trial needless. You say that it contains proofs of your lover's innocence ?”

“ So my brother told me !” replied Lucy—  
“ proofs that have shaken even his stern spirit ; but, lady, you must not betray my secret to the Prince, for he will stop our departure.”

“ If I tell him,” answered Eleanor, “ my promise shall bind both ; but, doubtless, the King, if there be any clear proofs here, in these papers, will order the wager of battle to be delayed. But go—get thee ready for thy task, dear Lucy ; when Edward comes, I will send for thee again.”



## CHAPTER XI.

ABOUT an hour before the return of the young Earl of Ashby from his ride towards Leicester, his cousin Richard had presented himself in his antechamber, expecting to find him within. He was no favourite of the servants of the house, and a feeling of doubt and distrust towards him had become general amongst them. A cold look from the armourers, and a saucy reply from a page—importing that the Earl was absent, and that no one could tell when he would come back—was all the satisfaction which Richard de Ashby could obtain ; and, returning into the court, he paced slowly across towards the gate where he had left his horses.

Sir William Geary passed him just at that

moment, but did not stop, merely saying, with his cold, supercilious look, "Ha, Dickon! thou art in the way to make a great man of thyself, it seems!"

"Stay, Geary, stay!" cried Sir Richard, not very well pleased either with his tone or his look.

But Sir William walked on, replying, "I can't at present, Dickon. For once in my life, I am busy."

"They all look cold upon me," muttered Richard de Ashby, as he walked slowly on; "can anything have been discovered?" His heart sunk at the thought, and the idea of flying crossed his mind for a moment. But he was, as we have shown, not without a dogged sort of courage, and he murmured, "No, I will die at the stake sooner. I must find out, however, what has taken place, that I may be prepared."

He somewhat quickened his pace, and had already put his foot in the stirrup, to mount his horse, when he heard a voice calling him by name, and turning round with a sudden start, he beheld Guy de Margan coming after him with rapid steps.

“ I saw you from my window,” said the courtier, hastening up, “ and have much matter for your ear. But let us go down by the back way into the town, and let your horses follow.”

In a moment, Richard de Ashby had banished from his countenance the look of anxiety and thought which it had just borne, not choosing that one, who was already somewhat more in his confidence than he liked, should see those traces of painful care, which might, perhaps, lead him, joined with the knowledge he already possessed, to a suspicion of those darker deeds which had not been communicated to him.”

“ Well, Guy!” he said, as they walked on, “ how flies the crow now? I find my noble cousin, the Earl, has gone out to take an afternoon ride—not the way, methinks, that men usually spend the last few hours before a mortal encounter. But he does it for bravado; and, if he do not mind, his life and his renown will end together in to-morrow’s field.”

“ Perhaps ’twere better they did,” answered Guy de Margan, shortly; and then—replying to a look of affected wonder which Richard de Ashby

turned upon him, he continued, "I know not your plans or secrets, Dickon; but I fear you will find your cousin Alured less easy to deal with than even Hugh de Monthermer. He doubts the truth of the charge he has brought!"

"Then he should not have brought it!" said Richard de Ashby. "What have I to do with that?"

"Nothing, perhaps," replied Guy de Margan, "but he loves not any of those whose reports induced him to make it. I found that, myself, while I was sitting with him last night. He was strangely uncivil to me; but you are foremost on the list, Dickon!"

"Pooh!" cried the other. "Let him but conquer in to-morrow's lists, and the pride of having done so will make him love us all dearly again. I know Alured well, De Margan, and there is no harm done, if that be all!"

"But it is not all!" said Guy de Margan. "While I was sitting with him, an old woman—a withered old woman, the servants told me after—came up to call him to your house, bearing a message, as if from you."

“ ’Twas false ! I was far away—Did he go ?” exclaimed Richard de Ashby, now moved indeed.

“ That did he, immediately,” answered his companion. “ I walked down with him, and saw him in.”

“ Why, in the name of hell, did you not stop him ?” cried Richard de Ashby. “ Old woman ! I have no old woman there !”

“ Perhaps he went to see the young one you have there,” said Guy de Margan, in a careless tone.

“ Curse her ! if she have——” exclaimed Richard de Ashby ; and then suddenly stopped himself, without finishing his sentence.

“ Yes !” proceeded Guy de Margan, with the same affected indifference of tone ; “ yes, he did go down, and went in, and stayed for more than an hour, for I was at the King’s banquet, and saw him come back ; and I spoke with his henchman, Peter, afterwards, who told me that he was mightily affected all that night, and brought with him, from your house, a paper, which he sealed carefully up. Look to it, Dickon—look to it !”

They had now come to a flight of steps which led them down over one of the rocky descents which were then somewhat more steep than they are now in the good town of Nottingham, and Richard de Ashby, pausing at the top, ordered the horses to go round, while he with Guy de Margan took the shorter way. He said nothing till he reached the bottom; but there, between two houses, neither of which had any windows on that side, he stopped suddenly, and grasping his companion's arm, regarded him face to face with a bent brow and searching eye.

“What is it you mean, Guy de Margan?” he asked. “You either know or suspect something more than you say.”

“I know nothing,” replied Guy de Margan, “and I wish to know nothing, my good friend. So tell me nothing. I am the least curious man in all the world. What I suspect is another affair. But now listen to me. The death of Hugh de Monthermer, sweet gentleman though he be, would not be unpleasant to me; the death of the Earl, though you would have to wear mourning for your Earldom, would not, I have

reason to believe, be very inconvenient or unpleasant to you. Now mark me, Dickon; if these two men meet to-morrow, your cousin Alured, doubting the justice of his cause, and shaken by foolish scruples, will fall before the lance of Hugh de Monthermer as sure as I live. Every one of the court sees it, and knows it. That would suit your purpose well, you think? But you might be mistaken even there. Nothing but dire necessity will drive Monthermer to take the Earl's life. The Prince is to be judge of the field, and he will drop his warder on the very slightest excuse. Thus you may be frustrated, and both you and I see our hopes marred in a minute.—But there is something more to be said: I do not choose that your purpose should be served, and not my own."

"Why, Guy de Margan," exclaimed his companion, in a bitter tone; "you do not think that I am tenderly anxious for Monthermer's life?"

"No, nor I for Alured de Ashby's," answered De Margan; "but either both shall die or both shall live, Richard de Ashby. Your

cousin's mind is now in that state, that but three words from me, turning his suspicions in another channel, will make him retract his charge, and offer amends to him he has calumniated.—Ay, and worse may come of it than that. Now I will speak these words, Richard de Ashby, in plain terms—I will prevent this conflict, unless you assure me that both shall fall.”

“But how can I do that?” demanded Richard de Ashby, gazing upon him with evident alarm. “How is it possible for me to insure an event which is in the hand of fate alone?”

“In the hand of fate!” cried Guy de Margan, with a scoff. “To hear thee speak, one would think that thou art as innocent as Noe's dove. Art thou not thy cousin's godfather in the lists to-morrow?”

“Ay, so he said,” replied Richard de Ashby.

“Then instruct him how to slay his adversary,” rejoined Guy de Margan. Tell him not to aim at shield or helmet, but at any spot; his shoulder—his arm—his throat—his hip, where he can see the bare hauberk.”

“Alured knows better,” said Richard. “He



will drive straight upon him with his lance ; and then the toughest wood—the firmest seat—the steadiest hand—the keenest eye, will give the victory.”

“ Nay, but tell him,” answered Guy de Margan, in a lower tone, “ that you know what is passing in his mind, the doubts, the hesitation, and that the conflict on foot is that wherein alone he can hope to win the day. Ask him if he ever saw Hugh de Monthermer unhorsed by a straight-forward stroke of a lance, whoever was his opponent ? But show him that, by striking him at the side, and turning him in the saddle, he may be brought to the ground without a doubt.”

“ But still what is this to me ?” asked Richard, impatiently ; “ the one or the other must win the day.”

“ No—no !” cried Guy de Margan. “ I will show you a means by which, if you can ensure that Alured de Ashby’s lance dips but its point in Hugh de Monthermer’s blood, it shall carry with it as certain a death as if it went through and through his heart ; a scratch—a simple scratch—will do it.—When I was in the land of

the old Romans—now filled with priests and sluggards, who have nought on earth to do but to sit and debauch the peasant girls, and hatch means of ridding themselves of enemies—a good honest man, who took care that none should be long his foe, and was possessed of many excellent secrets, gave me, for weighty considerations, a powder of so balmy a quality, that either dropped into a cup or rubbed on a fresh wound, though the quantity be not bigger than will lie on a pin's-head, it will cure the most miserable man of all his sorrows, or within half an hour will take out the pain of the most terrible injury—for ever!”

“I understand—I understand,” said Richard de Ashby. “Give me the powder; would I had had it long ago. But how can one fix it to the lance's point, so that in the shock of combat it is not brushed off?”

“Mix it with some gentle unguent,” answered Guy de Margan; “'twill have the same effect.”

“I will—I will,” replied his companion; “then with a thick glove I will feel the lance's point, to make sure that all is right, like a good cautious godfather in arms, first care-

fully trying the wood upon my knee, with every other seeming caution which the experienced in such matters use. No fear but Alured, one way or other, will draw his blood. Oh yes! and both shall go on the same road.—Half an hour, say you?—Will he have strength to end the combat?”

“Fully,” replied Guy de Margan; “for within two minutes of his death he will seem as strong as ever. I tried it on a hound—just scratched his hanging lip, then took him to the field, and on he went after the game, eager and strong and loud tongued; but in full cry down dropped he in a moment, quivering and panting, and after beating the air for some two minutes with his struggling paws, lay dead.”

“Give it me—give it me!” cried Richard de Ashby, and then burst into a fit of laughter, as if it were the merriest joke that ever had been told.

Guy de Margan put his hand into the small embroidered pouch he wore under his arm, and took forth an ivory box, not bigger than a large piece of money.

“What, is this all?” exclaimed Richard de Ashby, taking the little case. “Is this enough?”

“To slay more men than fell at Evesham,” replied Guy de Margan; “but be careful how you mix it. Remember, the slightest scratch upon your own hand sends you to the place appointed for you, if but a grain of that finds entrance.”

“I will take care—I will take care,” said Richard de Ashby; “and now look upon the deed as done. Ere this time to-morrow, you will have had your revenge—and I shall be Earl of Ashby.”

“Ha! ha!” cried Guy de Margan, “is the truth out at length? Well, good Richard, fare thee well; we shall meet to-morrow in deep grief for the events of this sad field. In the meantime I will go to your cousin, the short-lived Earl, and nerve him for this battle. I will inform him with mysterious looks that there is a plot afoot to delay the combat, and to make him believe his adversary innocent. You harp on the same string, when you see him; and I will tell him, too, that he shall have proof sufficient

early to-morrow of Monthermer's guilt. If we but get him to the field, the matter's done—he will not retract."

"Farewell, De Margan — farewell!" said Richard de Ashby, "I will go home and make inquiries there;" and as he turned away, he murmured—"If this powder be so potent, there may be enough for you also, my good friend—but I shall have another to deal with first. Kate Greenly, my pretty lady, you have a secret too much to carry far; if you have not betrayed me already, I will take care that you shall not do so now."

A few minutes brought him to the house he had hired in Nottingham, and knocking hard, the door was almost instantly opened by a young lad whom he had left behind with his unhappy paramour.

"Where is the lady?" was the first question that the youth's master put to him. "In her own chamber?"

"No, noble sir," replied the servant; "she went forth some time ago."

"Gone forth!" exclaimed his master—"gone

forth, when I forbade her to cross the threshold!"

"I could not stay her, sir," rejoined the youth, who had been brought up in no bad school for learning impudence, as well as other vices. "Women will gad, sir, and who can stop them?"

"Hold thy saucy prate, knave!" cried the knight, "and answer me truly. Who has been here since I went?"

"Nobody, sir," replied the boy—"nobody, but the old priest."

"What old priest?" demanded his master, with a bent and angry brow.

"The old priest who was here before, noble sir," said the boy, in a more timid tone, for his lord's look frightened him. "He who was here the night you went to Lindwell."

"Ha!" cried Richard de Ashby; "a priest here that night? 'tis well for him I caught him not!—When was he here again?"

"Twice, sir," replied the youth; "once in the morning; and last night she sent me for him again."

“And no one else?” asked Richard de Ashby.

“No one,” answered the boy, firmly; and then added, in a more doubtful tone—“no one that I remember.”

“Boy, ’tis a lie!” replied his master. “I see it on thy face: thou know’st thou liest!”—and as he spoke, he caught him by the breast, giving him a shake that made his breath come short. “Who has been here? If thou speak’st not at a word, thou shalt have a taste of this!” and he laid his hand upon his dagger.

“No one, indeed—no one that I know of,” said the boy. “I may suspect——”

“And who do you suspect?” asked Richard de Ashby.

“Why, noble sir, last night,” replied the boy, “as I was going up the street to seek the priest, I saw two gentlemen come near the house; and one of them, who was the noble Earl, your cousin, I am sure, went up as if to the door, and, I think, was let in; the other turned away.”

“Did my cousin go in?” demanded Richard. “Say me but yea or nay.—Did he go in, I say?”

“I think so, sir,” replied the youth—“I think so, but cannot be sure; there came a sudden light across the road as if the door opened, but by that time I was too far up the street to see.”

“’Tis as De Margan said,” thought the knight; and striding up at once to the chamber where the corpse was laid, he found the door wide open, and the body fairly laid out and decked, as it was called. A crucifix and some sprigs of holly were on the breast; a small cup of holy water stood near; a lamp was burning, although the sun was not yet down, and everything gave plain indication that the man had not died without the succour of the church, and that the corpse had been watched by other eyes besides those of poor Kate Greenly.”

“I have been betrayed!” said Richard de Ashby to himself.—“I have been betrayed! Yet if it be but the priest, there is no great harm done. The secret of confession, at all events, is safe. But where is the girl herself, and what has been her communication with Alured? That must be known ere many hours be over—perhaps I shall know it soon enough.—And yet what can



she tell, but that a wounded man died in my house, brought in by people who had once visited me, and that, too, while I was absent?—'Tis my own conscience makes me fear. If Ellerby would but betake himself to Wales or France, or anywhere but here, all would be safe enough; but he keeps hovering about, like a moth round a candle. Where are this man's clothes, I wonder?"—and taking up the lamp, for it was now rapidly growing dark, he sought carefully about the room; but neither clothes, nor sword, nor dagger were to be found.

"There is a plot against me," he continued; "'tis evident enough now. She may have gained more information than I think; she may have overheard something. A paper!—What paper could she give to Alured? Perhaps the covenant that I foolishly gave to these men! He might have had it about him. Ellerby may have forgotten it. That were damnation, indeed! Perhaps 'twere better to fly, while there is yet time!—Fly? no, never!—to be a wandering outcast upon the face of the earth, seeking my daily sustenance at the sword's point, or

else by art and cunning, when the earldom of Ashby is almost within my grasp ! No, never ! I will go face it at once, and woe to him that crosses me !—If I could but find that girl—Hark, there is a noise below !” and with a nervous start he turned to listen, and soon heard that the sounds proceeded from the servants, whom he had sent round with his horses, talking with the lad in the hall.

“I will go face it at once,” he repeated to himself—“I will wait for him at his lodging, and soon find out what he knows : doubtless he has kept it to his own breast. Alured is not one to cast a stain upon his race. No, no ; he will not accuse one of the name of Ashby !”

Thus saying, he descended the stairs ; and bidding his servants keep good watch in the house till he returned, he took his way back to the castle on foot. On reaching the apartments of his cousin, he found a number of attendants in the outer room, apparently not long returned from a journey. Some time had since passed, however, for they were eating and drinking merrily,

and little did they seem disposed to interrupt their meal for their lord's poor kinsman.

"My lord is out, Sir Richard," said one "he is gone to the Prince's lodging."

"Nonsense, Ned!" cried another—"he's come back again; but he told Peter that he did not wish to be disturbed by any one."

"Of course, he did not thereby mean me," replied Richard de Ashby, sternly. "Go in, Ned, and tell him I am here."

The man obeyed, sullenly enough, and the moment after, the knight heard his cousin's voice, saying, in a hasty tone—"I want not to see him. Tell him I am engaged—going out on matters of moment. Yet, stay, send him in."

Richard de Ashby's eyes were fixed sternly upon the ground as he heard the bitter confirmation of his fears, and he muttered to himself—"Ay, he has heard more than he should have known."

When the servant returned, however, and bade him follow to his lord's presence, he cleared his brow, and went in with as satisfied an air as he could well assume. The table was

laid for supper, and his cousin was standing at the end, in the act of setting down from his hand a drinking cup of jewelled agate, the contents of which he had half-drained.

“I would not have disturbed you, Alured,” said the knight, “but as I am to go with you to the field, it is necessary that we should talk over our arrangements.”

“I have no arrangements to make,” cried the young Earl, looking at him askance, like a fiery horse half inclined to kick at the person who approaches. “I am going to fight—that is all. I have had a lance in my hand before now, and know how to use it.”

“Yes,” replied Richard de Ashby, “and you will use it right well, and to the destruction of your adversary. I am aware of that, Alured; but still there may be many things to be said between us. When one knows one’s opponent in the lists, consideration and skill may be employed to baffle his particular mode of fighting—his art—his trick, call it what you will. Now I have often seen Hugh de Monthermer run a course—you, I think, never have but once?”

“I met him hand to hand at Evesham,” replied his cousin, impatiently; “that is enough for me. I want neither advice nor assistance, cousin mine; and more, as we are now upon the subject, you go not to the field with me—I will choose another godfather.—Nay, no attitudes or flashing eyes. I tell thee, Dickon, things have come to my knowledge which may touch your life, so make the most of the hint. The time is short, for as soon as the Prince returns, he shall be made acquainted with all the facts.”

“But, Alured, explain!” exclaimed Richard de Ashby.

“No need of explanation,” replied his cousin; “you will hear enough of it ere long, if you wait. Let your conscience be your guide to stay or fly. At any rate, remain not here. I go for a moment to shake hands with Hugh de Monthermer, ere I meet him to-morrow at the lance’s point, and to tell him that I bear him no ill will, though honour compels me to appear in arms against him. I would not find you here when I return; and let me not see your face at to-

morrow's lists, for it would bring down a curse upon me."

Thus saying, he strode out of the room without waiting for a reply, and Richard de Ashby, in the passion of the moment, writhed his fingers in his own hair, and tore it out by the roots.

"A curse upon him!" he cried, "a curse upon him! Well, let it fall! Tell the Prince? Blast his own blood? Stain the name of Ashby for ever? Bring me to the block? But I know better," he continued, suddenly recovering himself—"he shall never do that;" and looking anxiously round the room, he drew from his pouch the small box that Guy de Fargan had given him, approached the door, which his cousin had left partly open, pushed it gently to, and then, returning to the table, he poured a small portion of the white powder it contained into the drinking cup of Alured de Ashby. A triumphant smile lighted up his countenance as he saw the powder disappear in the wine which still remained in the cup.

"He will drink again when he comes back,"

said the villain. "I know him. Ha! ha! ha! —and he must tell his story soon to Prince Edward's ear, or his tongue may fail him, by chance.—On my life, I think he is a coward, and afraid to face this Monthermer. But doubt and hesitation are past with me. Kate Greenly, 'tis your turn now. She is with the priest, doubtless—she is with the priest.—Her tongue once silenced, and I Earl of Ashby, who will dare to accuse me then?—Or if they do, why let them! I will unfurl my banner on my castle walls, call around me the scattered party of De Montfort, and set Edward at defiance, till, by a soft capitulation, I ensure the past from all inquiries. But now for the girl—she must see no more suns rise!"

And thus saying, he quitted the room and castle with a hasty step.

## CHAPTER XII.

“THE Earl of Ashby, my good lord, desires to speak with you,” said stout Tom Blawket, addressing Hugh de Monthermer, as he sat at a table, writing.

“Admit him instantly,” answered Hugh. “Is he alone?”

“Quite alone, my lord,” replied the man, and retired.

The burst of anger to which Alured de Ashby had given way, when irritated by his cousin’s presence, had passed off; and he now entered the chamber of Hugh de Monthermer, grave and sad, but with feelings of a high and noble kind. He turned his eye back, as he passed the door towards the anteroom, where a



page and some yeomen were seated; and Hugh de Monthermer, divining the meaning of the glance, bade Blawket, as he ushered the Earl in, clear the outer chamber and let no one remain there.

The Earl advanced at once towards his adversary, and with a frank though grave air, held out his hand. Hugh took it and pressed it in his own, and seating themselves together, Alured de Ashby began upon the motive of his coming.

"Monthermer," he said, "I cannot meet you to-morrow in the field, as needs must be in consequence of my own rashness and the world's opinion, without saying a word or two to clear my conscience and relieve my heart. When I made the charge I did make, I was induced by artful men to believe you guilty. Since then, however, reason and thought, and some accidental discoveries, have made me doubt the fact.

"Doubt?" exclaimed Hugh de Monthermer, in a tone of reproach.

"Well, well," said Alured, "to believe that the charge is false. Will that satisfy you?"

“It must,” replied Hugh de Monthermer. “Am I then to suppose, that it is the world’s opinion, the fear of an idle scoff alone, which makes you draw your sword against a friend, which makes you still urge—but I will not use a term that can pain you—which makes you risk your life and mine, a sister’s happiness, and your own repose of mind for ever, all for an idle scoff?”

“Even so, Monthermer, even so!” said Alured de Ashby, in a sad, but determined tone. “I know it all—all you could urge; but yet you and I are well matched in arms; both have some renown—yours, perhaps, higher than my own, from having fought in Palestine—and it is impossible that, after having called you to the field, I can in aught retract, without drawing down upon myself a charge of fear, which must never rest upon my name. Men would say I dared not meet you, and that must not be.”

Hugh rose from his seat, and walked twice across the room, then shook his head with a grieved and sorrowful expression, replying, “Ashby, you are wrong; but I, on my part, must say no word to shake your resolution. As you

judge best, so must you act, but I go to the field with a heart free from wrong ; sad, bitterly sad, that I am forced to draw the sword against a man whom I would fain take to my heart with love ;—sad, bitterly sad, that whether I live or die, a charge I have not merited brings sorrow upon me. But, as I have said, I will urge no motive upon you to change your purpose ; only hear me, Alured, when I call God and all the holy saints to witness, that the thought of injuring your father by word or deed never could cross my mind—that I am, in short, as guiltless of his death as the babe unborn !”

“ I believe you—I do believe you, indeed,” said the young Earl.

“ Well, then,” replied Hugh, “ I have a charge to give you, Alured. None can tell what the result of such a day as to-morrow may be. I go with my heart bent down with care and sorrow ; your sister’s love blunts my lance and rusts my sword—hatred of the task put upon me hangs heavy on my arm—and ’tis possible that, though mine be the righteous cause, yours the bad one, I may fall, and you may conquer. If so, there

is a debt of justice which you owe me, and I charge you execute it—ay, as an act of penitence. Proclaim with your own voice the innocence of the man you have slain, seek every proof to show he was not guilty, and bring the murderers to the block—even should you find them in your own house.”

The Earl covered his eyes with his hands, and remained silent for a moment, but then looked up again, saying, “No, no; ’tis I that shall fall. The penalty of my own rashness at first, the penalty of my own weakness now—for it is a weakness—will be paid by myself, Monthermer. I feel that my days are at an end; my death under your lance will clear you of the charge that I have brought against you, and yours will be the task to seek and punish the assassins of my father.”

“And your sister?” said Hugh de Monthermer.

“I have seen her,” replied her brother. “I have seen her, and told her my wishes and my will. Of that no more; only remember, Monthermer, that when to-morrow I

call God to witness that my cause is just, the cause I mean is not my charge against you, but the defence of my own honour against the injurious suspicions of the world."

Hugh looked at him with a rueful smile. "Alas, Alured!" he said, "I fear the eye of Heaven will not see the distinction. Ask your confessor what he thinks of such a reservation. But if it must be so, so let it be! Yet 'tis a strange thing that two men, most unwilling to do each other wrong, should be doomed by one hasty word to slaughter each other against conscience."

"Ay, so goes the world, Hugh," replied the Earl, "and so it will go too, I fear, till the last day. We must all do our devoir as knights."

Hugh de Monthermer remembered of his knightly oath and the true duties of chivalry, and he could not help thinking that the mere reputation of a lesser virtue was held to be of more importance than the great and leading characteristics of that noble institution. He said nothing, however; for he would not urge the Earl to forego his purpose, and he knew that reproach would irritate, but not change him.

“I grieve, Alured,” he said, “that you feel it so; but as you are the mover in all this, with you must it rest. I can but defend my innocence as best I may.”

The tone which the young knight assumed, the calmness, the kindness, the want of all bravado, touched Alured de Ashby's heart more than aught else on earth could have done; and wringing Hugh de Monthermer's hand, he said, “Good bye, good bye! I believe you innocent, from my soul, Monthermer, and I would give my right hand that you or I were a hundred miles hence this night.”

With these words he quitted the room, and turned his steps toward his own lodging. He had thought, by visiting his adversary, to satisfy those better feelings, which, under the pressure of dark and terrible circumstances, had arisen in his heart—he had thought to relieve his bosom of the load that sat upon it, to make his conscience feel light and easy, and to cast off the burden of regret. But the result had been very different: the bitterness in his heart was doubled; sorrow, shame, anxiety, were all increased; and yet not

one word or look of him whom he had deeply injured, gave human nature the opportunity of rousing up anger to take the place of regret. He felt his heart burn within him, his eyeballs seemed on fire, his head ached, and, ere he entered the door which led to his apartments, he threw back his hood, and walked three or four times up and down the court.

He was just about to go in, when another figure, coming across from the same side where his lodgings lay, approached and cut him off, as it were; and in a moment after, Guy de Margan was at his side.

“Give you good evening, my lord,” he said.

“Good night,” rejoined Alured, advancing as if to pass him.

“Pray what is the matter with your cousin Richard?” asked the other. “I met him hurrying through the gates but now like a madman.”

“I know not, sir,” replied Alured, impatiently; but the moment after he continued, in a changed tone—“By the way, Sir Guy, I would fain speak with you. Thou hast been a friend and companion of Richard de Ashby.”

“ Well, my lord !” exclaimed Guy de Margan.

“ Thou hast aided him with all thy might, to fix the crime of my father’s death on Hugh de Monthermer !” said the Earl, and then paused, as if for a reply.

None was made, however, and he went on. “ The accusers may be the accused some day—so look to it ! look to it !” and he turned hastily towards his lodging.

Guy de Margan stayed for a moment in the middle of the court, and then darted after Alured de Ashby, exclaiming, “ My lord—my lord ! one word. Do you mean to charge me with any share in your father’s death ? If you do, I demand, that this instant, before the King, you make it publicly. I know, too well, my lord, to dare you to arms upon such a quarrel ; but if the Earl of Ashby thinks fit first to accuse one, and then another, I will put myself upon my trial by my peers, who will force you to prove your words.”

“ Out of my way, reptile !” cried the Earl—  
“ Out of my way, or I will stamp upon thy



head, and crush thee like a poisonous worm. Who accused thee? I did not!"

"I thought the Earl of Ashby might seek to avoid fighting his adversary," said Guy de Margan, drawing a step or two back, "and wish to do it at my expense—Hugh de Monthermer is a renowned knight, and no pleasant foe to meet at outrance."

Alured felt for the pommel of his sword, but he had left it on the table behind him; and springing at once upon Guy de Margan, he caught him by the throat before he could dart away, and hurled him backwards with tremendous force upon the pavement.

Stunned and bleeding, Guy de Margan lay without sense or motion; and the young Earl, crying, "Lie there, fox!" strode back to his apartments. Passing hastily through the other rooms to his own chamber, he paused by the side of the table, in deep thought; and then, pronouncing the words, "A set of knaves and villains!" he filled the agate cup to the brim with wine, raised it to his lips, and drained it to the dregs.

## CHAPTER XIII.

SOME half hour after she had left the Princess—and we will venture to hope that the reader has particularly marked at what precise moment of time each of the scenes which we have lately described were taking place in the castle of Nottingham—some half-hour after she had left the Princess, Lucy de Ashby, covered with one of those large gowns of grey cloth which were worn by the less strict orders of nuns, while travelling, with her fair head wrapped in a wimple, and a pilgrim's bag hung over her shoulder, filled with a few trinkets and some other things which she thought necessary to take with her, leaned thoughtfully upon the table in the wide, oddly-shaped chamber, which had been appropriated to her in Nottingham Castle. Near her

stood one of the maids, whom we have seen with her before, and who now watched her mistress's countenance and the eager emotions that were passing over it, with a look of anxiety and affection.

At length, with a sudden movement, as if she had long restrained herself, the girl burst forth, "Let me go with thee, lady!"

"You know not where I go, Claude," replied Lucy; "you know not, indeed, that I am going anywhere!"

"Yes, yes," said the girl, "I am sure you are going somewhere; if not, why have you put on that disguise?"

"But—but to see if it would do, in case of need," answered Lucy. "Here, take it off good girl! I should not recognise myself, much less would others!"

"Ay, lady, but still thou art going somewhere," said the girl, aiding her to pull off the wimple and gown. "I know not where, 'tis true, but I will go with thee, anywhere—neither distance nor danger will scare me; and I am sure I can help thee!"

“ Well, be it as thou wilt !” replied Lucy, after a moment’s thought, “ but it may be that we shall leave behind us courts and soft beds for ever, Claude.”

“ I care not—I care not !” cried the girl, “ I would rather live with the bold foresters in the wood than at Nottingham or Lindwell either.”

Lucy smiled, as the girl’s words brought back the memory of one happy day, and with it the hopes that then were bright.

“ Well, haste thee,” she said, “ haste thee to make ready ; there are many here who know thee, Claude, and we must both pass unrecognised.”

“ Oh !” answered her attendant, “ I will transform me in a minute in such sort that my lover—if I had one—should refuse me at the altar, or else be forsworn ! Hark ! there is some one knocks.”

“ Pull it off—pull it off !” cried Lucy, disembarassing herself of the gown. Now run, and see !”

“ The Princess, madam, requires your instant presence,” said the girl, after having spoken for

a moment to some one at the door; and, with a quick step, and eager eye, Lucy de Ashby advanced along the corridor, following one of Eleanor's ladies who had brought the message. The latter opened the door of the Princess's chamber for her young companion to enter, but did not, as usual, go in herself; and Lucy found Eleanor and her husband alone.

Edward was clothed in arms, as he had come from Leicester, dusty, and soiled with travelling, but his head was uncovered, except by the strong curling hair which waved round his lordly brow, while a small velvet bonnet and feather, in which he had been riding, was seen cast upon one of the settles near the door. He was walking, with a slow step, up and down the room, with his brows knit, and a glance of disappointment and even anger in his eye. Eleanor, on the contrary, sat and gazed on him in silence, with a grave and tender look, as if waiting till the first ebullition of feeling was past and the moment for soothing or consolation arrived.

“Here she is, Edward,” said the Princess, as

soon as Lucy entered; and those words showed her that the conversation of her two royal friends had been of herself, and made her fear that the evident anger of Edward had been excited by something she had done.

The timid and imploring look which she cast upon him, however, when he turned towards her, instantly banished the frown from his brow; and taking her hand, he said, "Be not afraid, dear lady; I am more angry perhaps than becomes me, but 'tis not with you or yours. When I came here, some twenty minutes since, my sweet wife gave me this paper, which tends to clear our poor friend Hugh, and I instantly took it to the King to beseech him but to delay the combat for a week. Judge of my surprise, when he refused me with an oath, and swore that either your brother should make good his charge or die. But 'tis not my father's fault, lady," he continued, seeing a look of horror, mingled somewhat with disgust, come upon Lucy's face—" 'tis not my father's fault, I can assure you. Mortimer and Pembroke, and some others who have his ear, have so prepossessed his mind, that

for the moment all words or arguments are vain ; and yet this combat must not take place, or one of two noble men will be murdered."

"Then let me try to stop it," answered Lucy. "Has the Princess, my lord——"

"Yes—yes, she has," cried Edward, "and you must try, sweet Lucy ; but I doubt that even your persuasions—I doubt that even the bribe of your fair hand will induce Monthermer to fly and leave his name to ignominy even for a day."

"Nay — nay, he will," said Eleanor ; "certain of his own innocence, with the confession of her brother which Lucy has, that he believes him guiltless ——"

"'Tis but an expression of doubt," interrupted Edward, "if you told me right."

"Nay, Edward," asked the Princess, rising and laying her hand upon his arm ; "if the case were our own—if I besought you with tears and with entreaties, and every argument that she can use, would you not yield?"

"'Twere a hard case, dear lady mine," replied Edward, kissing her—" 'twere a hard case, in

truth, yet I may doubt. His answer might be clear; with honour, innocence, and courage on his side, why should he fly?"

"To save *my* brother," said Lucy, looking up in the Prince's face.

"Ay, but his renown!" exclaimed Edward.—  
"Yet he must fly. Some means must be found to persuade him."

"Cannot you, my most gracious lord?" asked Lucy.

"Ay, that is the question," rejoined the Prince, again walking up and down the room. "What will be said of me, if I interfere?—My father's anger, too.—To tell a Knight to fly from his devoir!—Yet it must be done.—Hark ye, fair lady; go to him, as you have proposed, use prayers, entreaties, whatever may most move him—do all that you have proposed—offer to go with him and be his bride. He scarcely can refuse that, methinks;" and he turned a more smiling look towards Eleanor. "But if all fails, tell him that I entreat—nay, that I command him—if he be so sure of shortly proving his innocence, that no man can even dream I have done



this thing for favour—tell him I command him to fly this night, and that I will justify him—that I will avow 'twas done by my express command; and let me see the man in all my father's realms to blame it!"

"Will you, most gracious lord," said Lucy—"will you give it me under your hand? If I have but words, Hugh may think it is a woman's art to win him to her wishes."

"Is there an ink-horn there?" demanded Edward, looking round.

"Here—here," said the Princess, shewing him the materials for writing; and with a rapid hand Edward traced a few words upon the paper, and then read them, but still held the order in his hand. "Remember," he said, turning to Lucy, and speaking in an earnest, almost a stern tone, "this is to be the last means you use, and not till every other has been tried in vain. 'Tis a rash act, I fear, and somewhat an unwise one, that I do, though with a good intent, but I would fain it were never mentioned were it possible."

"This makes all safe," said Lucy, taking the

paper; "he will go now, my lord, that his honour is secure. But I promise you, no entreaties of mine shall be spared to make him go without it. I will forget that I have this precious thing, until he proves obdurate to all my prayers. Even then, methinks, I may show some anger to find him go at any words of yours when he has scorned all mine.—But, good sooth, I shall be too grateful to God to see him go at all, to let anger have any part."

"Well — well, fair lady," said the Prince, "may God send us safely and happily through this dark and sad affair! We are told not to do evil, that good may come of it; but here, methinks, I only choose between two duties, and follow the greater. I act against my father's will, 'tis true; but thereby I save the shedding of innocent blood, and I spare the King himself a deed which he would bitterly repent hereafter. God give it a good end, I say once more! for we act for the best."

"Fear not — fear not, my Edward," said Eleanor; "God will not fail those that trust in him. May He protect thee, Lucy!" and as she

spoke she kissed her young friend's forehead tenderly. "Now tell me," she continued, "is all prepared for your expedition?"

"All," replied Lucy. "My girl Claude has got me a grey sister's gown, which will conceal me fully."

"Is that all?" cried the Prince. "Where are the horses?—but leave that to me. If Monthermer consents to go, bid him make no delay, nor stay for any preparation. He will find horses at the city gate—the northern gate, I mean. In half an hour they shall be there. Know you the way to his lodging?"

"Not well," said Lucy; "'tis, I think, the third door down the court;—but Claude will find it quickly, I don't doubt."

"There is a speedier way than that," replied the Prince. "Follow the passage running by your room, then down the steps, and you will see a door; if you knock there, you will find his page or some other servant, for it leads into his anteroom. It were better," he continued, thoughtfully, "that you made a servant carry the disguise, and not assume it till you are

sure that he will go. Were you to visit him in such a garb, fair lady," he added, taking her hand kindly, "and after to return unwedded, men might speak lightly of your reputation; and that which in holy purity of heart you did to avert a most needless combat, might turn to your discredit."

The blood came warmly into Lucy's cheek, but the moment after she looked up in the Prince's face, replying, with an air of ingenuous candour, "You think me, doubtless, somewhat bold, my lord, and many men may censure me, but I have something here"—and she laid her hand upon her heart—"which blames me not, but bids me go, in innocence of purpose, and share his fate whatever it may be. God knows this is a sad and painful bridal, such as I never thought to see. A father's death, a brother's rashness, and a lover's danger, may well cloud it with sorrow. But there is a higher joy in thinking I am doing what is right,—in thinking that I, a poor weak girl, by scorning idle tongues, and the coarse jests of those who cannot feel as I can, have a power to

save my brother's life, and to spare him I love the dreadful task of putting a bloody barrier 'twixt himself and me for ever.—Judge me aright, my lord !”

“I do—I do,” replied Edward ; “and now, farewell. God speed you, lady, on your noble enterprise !”

Lucy kissed his hand, and without more ado returned to her own chamber. “Quick, Claude !” she cried ; “are you ready ?”

“Yes, madam,” she answered. “Will you not put on the gown ?”

“No,” said Lucy, still pausing at the door ; “bring them with you, and follow quickly.”

The girl gathered up her lady's disguise and her own in haste, and Lucy led the way along the passage as the Prince had directed her. There were no doors on either side, and but a loophole every here and there, which showed that the corridor, along which they went, was practised in the wall. Full of renewed hope, and eager to see her scheme put in execution, the lady descended the steps, and was about at once to knock at the door, when her raised hand was stayed by hearing some one speaking.

She felt faint, and her heart beat quickly, for she recognised her brother's voice. Lucy listened, and distinctly heard the words—"I believe you innocent, from my soul, Monthermer; and I would give my right hand that you or I were a hundred miles hence this night."

A smile came upon her countenance. "He is preparing the way for me!" she murmured to herself; and again she listened, but all was silent, save a retreating step and a closing door.

"He is gone," said Lucy, turning to her maid. "Stay you here, Claude, for a minute or two;" and without knocking, she gently opened the door and looked in.

There was a small room before her, with a fire on the opposite side, and three stools near it, but no one there; and entering with a noiseless step, Lucy gazed round. A door appeared on either hand: that on the right was closed, but through it she heard sounds of talking and laughter: that on the left was in a slight degree ajar, but all was silent within. Gliding up to it with no noise but the light rustle of her garments, Lucy approached, and pushed it

gently with her hand—so gently that she saw before she was seen.

Nearly in the centre of the room stood he whom she loved, with his arms folded on his broad chest, his fine head bent, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and an expression both sorrowful and stern upon his lip and brow. As the door moved farther open, it roused him from his reverie, and he looked up ; but what a sudden change came instantly upon his countenance. An expression mingled of joy, surprise, and anxiety, passed across his face, and exclaiming, “ Lucy, dearest Lucy !” he sprang forward to meet her.

Drawing her gently into the room, he closed the door, and then held her for a moment to his bosom while both were silent ; for the throbbing of her heart left Lucy’s tongue powerless, and Hugh dared not speak lest it should dispel what seemed but too happy a dream.

“ Dearest Lucy,” he said, at length, “ even while I thank and bless you for coming, I must ask what brings you here ? It was rash, dear girl—it was rash ! If you had sent to me, I would have been with you in a moment. It is

not a minute yet since your brother was here."

"I know it," replied Lucy—"I know it all, Hugh. I know it was rash to come; but I am going to do everything that is rash to-night, and this is but the beginning. It is in general that you men sue to us women—till you are our masters, at least; now I come to sue to you."

"Oh, Lucy!" cried Hugh, with a sort of pre-science of what she was about to say—"what is that you are going to ask? Remember, Lucy—remember my honour. If you love me, that honour ought to be dearer to you than my life. Ask me nothing that may bring shame upon me."

"Listen to me—listen to me," she replied. "You must hear me, Hugh, before you can judge. Your honour *is* dearer to me than your life; and oh, Hugh! you have yet to learn how dear that is to Lucy de Ashby;" and as she spoke, the tears rose into her eyes, but she dashed them away, and went on. "Yet it is not for your life I fear, dear as it is to me. Oh, no! your heart is safe. Panoplied in innocence and strength, you go but to conquer. It



is for my brother that I fear—for my rash and hasty brother—ay, and guilty, if you will—for he who brings a false accusation against an innocent man is guilty. I tremble for him, Hugh ; I tremble for myself, too ; I fear that Hugh de Monthermer will draw upon his hand my brother's blood ; and a hand so stained can never clasp mine again."

"I know it," said Hugh ; "but what can I do? I have no choice, Lucy, but to live for misery or to die disgraced!"

"Yes," cried Lucy, eagerly—"yes, you have. Fly, Hugh de Monthermer ! give no reason to any one why you go. You are sure, ere long, to establish your innocence.—Appear not at the sound of the trumpet—appear not till you can prove his guilt upon the foul wretch who did the deed with which they charge you."

"What!" exclaimed Hugh de Monthermer—"to be condemned, not only as a criminal, but as a coward and a recreant—to have my name pass from mouth to mouth throughout all Europe as a byword—to have heralds say, when they would point out a craven and a traitor—'He is

like Hugh de Monthermer !—Oh, Lucy, Lucy ! think of my honour—think of my renown !”

“ But your honour is safe, Hugh,” answered Lucy, clinging to his arm. “ Alured himself admits your innocence. I heard him say but now——”

“ Ay, in this room between him and me,” replied Hugh de Monthermer; “ but to-morrow he goes into the lists, and calls God to witness that his cause is just. To me he owns the falsehood of the charge, but to the world upholds that it is true.”

“ Not so !” cried Lucy—“ look here, Monthermer—see what he says to me here !”—and she drew forth the paper which Alured had given her.

Hugh read it eagerly ; and as he saw her brother’s wish expressed, that, if he fell, their hands might be united, he turned his eyes towards the sweet girl beside him, with a look of tenderness and love deep and unutterable ; but then the moment after, waving his head with a melancholy air, he said, “ He knows you not as I know you, Lucy. His wish is kind and generous

—noble—most noble, and atones for all. But would Lucy follow it?”

“No!” she replied, raising her head, firmly. “Were I to waste away my life in hopeless regret and misery, my hand should never be given to him who sheds my brother’s blood. I vow it, so help me God at my utmost need! But hear me, Hugh,” she continued, her cheek, which had been very pale during the last words, becoming crimson—“Hear me, Hugh! hear me, my beloved!—hear me, and oh, grant my request! As eagerly, as fondly as ever you have sued for this hand, I now beseech you to take it.—On my knees, Hugh de Monthermer,” and she sunk upon her knees before him—“on my knees thus, bedewing your hand with my tears, I beseech you to make Lucy de Ashby your wife.”

“But how, dearest Lucy?” he cried, stooping to raise her. “What—what do you mean? How—how is this to be?”

“Fly!” exclaimed Lucy—“fly *with me* this night! Here is my brother’s full consent—here, also, is your justification—here, at the very first, he proclaims your innocence!”

“Ah, no!” replied Hugh de Monthermer,

shaking his head; "he says, but that he doubts my guilt. Oh, Lucy! you will drive me mad to give me such a precious sight in prospect, and then to sweep it all away. I tell thee, my beloved, there is not an honest man in all the realm that would not call me coward, if I fled."

"Is that all that stays you?" demanded Lucy. "What, if I show you that, amongst the highest and most honourable of the land, there are those who will exculpate and defend you?"

"You cannot do it, Lucy," replied Hugh. "You may think they would. They may have said some chance words—that 'twere better to fly—that I might avoid the combat for some days; but when the time came, their voices would be raised with all the rest against me. You can shew me no more than this, dear girl."

"I can!" answered Lucy. "There! read that; and if you hesitate a moment more, 'tis that Hugh de Monthermer loves not his promised bride, rejects her proffered hand, and scorns the rash and giddy girl, who for the sake of any ungrateful man cast from her every thought but one—the saving those she loves."

Hugh de Monthermer held the paper in his

hand for a moment without reading it, gazing upon the beautiful being beside him, as with her eyes full of lustre and light, her cheek glowing, her lip quivering, she addressed to him the only reproachful words which had ever fallen from her lips.

“Lucy,” he said, “I will not merit that reproach. You yourself have told me that my honour is dearer to you than my life. Let it be dearer than all other things, Lucy, and then tell me whether I can go with honour. Whether, if I do, men will not cry coward on me?—whether my renown will not suffer in the eyes of Europe? If you say yes, oh, with what joy will I fly, with Lucy for my companion! With what deep devotion will I strive through life to repay her generous self-devotion, and to show her what I think of that heart which could cast away all idle forms and ceremonies, set at nought empty opinion, and entertain, as you say, but the one thought—the saving those she loves.”

As he spoke, he clasped his arms around her, and Lucy hid her eyes upon his bosom, for they were running over with tears. But after a mo-

ment, she raised them again, saying—"Read—read, Hugh, that will satisfy you!"

Hugh de Monthermer approached nearer the lamp, and looking at the paper, exclaimed—"Prince Edward's writing! What is this?—

'Follow the plan of your fair lady, Monthermer. Fly with her as speedily as may be—she will tell you more; but fear not for your honour—I will be your warrant, and will say 'twas my command. You are my prisoner still, remember, and as such, cannot fight without the consent of

‘EDWARD.’

"This changes all!" cried Hugh de Monthermer; "but why not give me this before, dear Lucy?"

"Because the Prince required me so to act," replied Lucy—"only to use this as a last resource;" and she went on to tell him briefly but clearly all that had occurred.

"Let us be quick," she said, "dear Hugh! There will be horses down at the north gate by this time. My poor girl, Claude, is waiting on

the steps with a nun's gown for me, and some cunning disguise for herself. Have you nothing that you could cast over these gay garments? for as you are about to travel by night with a poor grey sister, 'twere as well not to seem so much the courtly cavalier."

Poor Lucy's heart, relieved from the burden that had rested on it, beat up high with renewed hope; but still the agitation which she suffered remained, like the flying clouds that follow a summer's storm, and filled her eyes with tears, while the jest was still upon her lips. Hugh held her to his heart, and soothed her, and might have felt inclined to spend a few minutes more in such a sweet employment, but Lucy reminded him of how quickly moved the wings of time.

"Remember, Hugh," she said, "the minutes and my courage are not stable things, and both are ebbing fast. My heart beats strangely quick and fearfully, and I must not faint or lag behind till we have passed the gates."

"Nor there either!" cried Hugh; "but your courage will rise, dear Lucy, when the immediate danger is past. We had better not go

quite alone, however, for we may yet have to use the strong hand by the way. I will send down Blawket and another to the gate with horses for themselves."

"But a disguise!" cried Lucy—"a disguise for you. Ere we quit the castle, all this gold and silk will send the tale abroad to every horseboy in the place."

"I have one ready," answered Hugh; "the priest's gown, in which I escaped before, may answer well a second time. Where is this girl of yours?"

"Upon the steps," replied Lucy. "I will call her."

"Nay, let me," said Hugh de Monthermer; and, opening the door of the anteroom and then that which opened on the stairs, he whispered, "Come in, my pretty maiden; bring the lamp with you—I will be back directly;" and passing on into the outer room, as soon as the maid was in his chamber and had shut the door, he called Blawket aside and gave him orders. Then sitting down at a table, he wrote a few words on a scrap of paper, which he entrusted to one of the armourers, saying, "Do not disturb



Sir John Hardy to-night, but give him that at daybreak to-morrow morning."

"'Twere a hard matter to disturb him, sir," answered the man; "for he's asleep by this time, and when once his eyes are shut, lightning will not make them wink for eight hours to come."

"It matters not," rejoined Hugh, "to-morrow will be soon enough—only be sure to give it;" and thus saying, he returned to his chamber, closing the doors carefully behind him.

The young knight actually started when he beheld Lucy in the grey gown and wimple, such was the change which it had made.

"You see, Hugh," she cried, smiling as she remarked his surprise—"you see what Lucy's beauty is made of. It all disappears when you take away from her her gay apparel, and cover her with the dull stole of the nun."

There might be a little coquetry in what she said, for Hugh de Monthermer could make but one answer, and he made it; but to say the truth, it was the coquetry of agitation, for Lucy sought to cover her own fears, and prevent her mind from resting on them. No time was now

lost, however; the black gown of the priest was speedily found and thrown over the other garments of the young Knight; and then the question became how they were to go forth, without passing through the room in which the servants and followers of Hugh de Monthermer were sitting.

“Can we not return by the steps in the passage, madam?” asked Claude. “Close to the door of your room there is the little staircase which leads by the tower into the great court.”

“That will be the best way,” said Hugh. “Draw the veil over your face, dear Lucy. No one will know us in such a guise as this; and there is little chance that we shall meet any one.”

The plan proposed was adopted, and neither in the corridor nor on the staircase did they find a living creature, though, as they came near the apartments of the Prince and Princess, steps were heard going on before them, and then a door opened and shut at some little distance. They reached the court, too, in safety, and Hugh de Monthermer took a step or two forward to see

that all was clear. A flash of light, however, proceeding from the main building, caused him instantly to draw back again under shelter of the doorway.

“There are torches coming,” he said.  
“Does the King ascend by this staircase?”

“Never, that I know of,” replied Lucy.

“Never,” said the girl Claude—“never!”

Hugh de Monthermer pushed the door partly to, but looked out through the remaining aperture to see what was passing.

“There is a crucifix,” he said, “and the host: they are carrying the sacrament to some one in extremis.”

“St. Mary bless me!” cried the girl Claude, as he mentioned the word crucifix, “I have forgot mine;” and away she ran up the stairs again, to seek her cross, which she had left behind.

## CHAPTER XIV.

RICHARD de Ashby smoothed his brow, and calmed his look, as he crossed from a tavern, where he had been making some inquiries, to a house on the opposite side of the street, not very far from the gates of the castle. It was a large stone building—close to an old church which then stood on that part of the hill—and as it contained several habitations, the entrance of the common staircase was, as usual in such circumstances, left open.

Ascending cautiously, guided by a rope, which passing through iron rings followed the tortuous course of the staircase, Richard de Ashby reached the first floor, and knocked at a small door on his right hand. Nobody appeared, and after waiting for several minutes, he knocked again.

This time he was more successful, the door was opened by a small strange-looking being, dressed in the garb of an old woman, with a brown and wrinkled face, and little, bright, grey eyes. She held a lamp in her hand, and gazing upon the countenance of the visitor with a keen and not very placable look, she asked—"What do you want?"

"I want Father Mark," replied Richard de Ashby.

"He is out visiting the sick," said the old dame.—"Nay, now," she continued, in a petulant tone, "I will answer all your questions at once, before you can put them. They all run in the same round. Father Mark is out—I don't know where he is gone—I don't know when he'll come home.—If you want to see him here, you must come again—If you want him to come to any sick man, you must leave word where.—Now you have it all."

Richard de Ashby had some acquaintance with the world, and fancied that he knew perfectly the character of the person before him. Drawing out, therefore, a small French piece of gold,

called an aignel, he slipped it into the old woman's hand, who instantly held it to the lamp, crying, "What's this—what's this?—Gold, as I live! Mary mother! you are a civil gentleman, my son. What is it that you want?"

"Simply an answer to a question," said Richard de Ashby: "Is there a young lady staying here—a pretty young lady—called Kate Greenly? You know her, methinks,—do you not?"

"Know her? to be sure I do," replied the old woman. "A blessing upon her pretty heart, she's been up here many a time, and I've carried a message for her before now; and she gave me some silver pieces, and a bodkin—I've got it somewhere about me now," and she began to feel in her bodice for poor Kate Greenly's gift.

"Then is she not here now?" said Richard de Ashby.

"No, no," answered the old woman, "she was here an hour before sunset, but she went away again. Oh, I know how it is!" she cried, as if a sudden thought had struck her—"you are the

gentleman whom good Father Mark has been preaching to her to run away from, because you are living in a state of naughtiness. These friars are so hard upon young folks ; and now you'd give another gold piece, like this, I'd swear, to know where she is, and get her to come back again."

" Ay, would I," replied Richard de Ashby, " two."

" Well, well," continued the old woman, " I know something, if I choose to say. She is not in Nottingham, but not far off."

" Can you show me where she is ?" demanded Richard de Ashby.

" Not to night—not to night !" cried the old woman. " Sancta Maria ! I would not go out to night all that way—not for a purse full of gold. Why it is up, after you get out of the gates, through Back Lane, and down the Thorny Walk till you come to the edge of Thorny Wood, and then you turn to the right by old Gaffer Brown's cottage, and, round under the chapel, and along by the bank where the fountain is, and then up by the new planting, just between it and the fern hill ; and then if you go straight on, and

take the first to the left, and the fourth to the right, it brings you to old Sweeting's hut, where she has gone to live with him, and his good dame."

Richard de Ashby saw no possible means of discovering the way from the old lady's description, and he was about to propose some other means of arranging the affair, when, with a shrewd wink of the eye, she said—"I am going out to her in the grey of the morning myself, and if you have any message to send her, I can take it; or, if a gentleman chooses to wait at the gate, and walk into the country after an old woman, who can help it?—I mustn't go with you through the town, you know, for that would make a scandal."

"I understand—I understand!" said Richard; "and if by your means I get her back again, you shall have two gold pieces such as that."

"Oh, an open hand gets all it wants," replied the priest's maid—"a close fist keeps what it has got; an open hand gets all it wants. 'Tis a true proverb, Sir Knight—'tis a true proverb. At the north gate, you know, in the grey of the morn-



ing. Wait till you see me come out with my basket, and then don't say a word, but come after."

"You are going to her, then?" asked Richard de Ashby.

"Yes, yes," said the old woman, impatiently; "I am going to carry her news, from the good father, of all that happens at the Castle to-night. But go along, now—go along! I am afraid of his coming back and finding you here: then he might think something, you know. At the north gate in the grey of the morning."

"I will not fail," replied Richard de Ashby, and turning away, he slowly descended the stairs.

The old woman paused not to look after him, but closed the door, muttering and talking to herself.

The life of Richard de Ashby had arrived at one of those moments so fearful, so terrible, in the career of wickedness, when one offence following another has accumulated scheme upon scheme, each implying new crimes, and new dangers, and each, though intended to guard the

other, offering, like the weakened frontier of an over extended empire, but new points of peril, but fresh necessity of defence.

“ ’Tis unfortunate,” he thought, as he turned from the door—“ ’tis unfortunate that I have not found her ; but she is absent from the city, and that is one point gained.”

The moment, however, that his mind had thus cast off the thought of Kate Greenly, and the secret she possessed, it turned with maddening rapidity to all the other points of his situation.

“ What shall I do with the body ?” he asked himself. “ I cannot let it lie and rot there.—I wonder how fares my cousin Alured ? He has surely drank the wine. Oh, yes ; I know him, he has drank it, and more too.—If that man Ellerby were not hovering round about, all might be secure still.”

The word *still* showed better than any other the state of his mind, though he hid it from himself. He knew, in short, that he was anything but secure. Over his head hung the awful cloud of coming detection and punishment. He saw

it with his eyes, he felt it in his heart, that the tempest was about to descend; and, as those who, in a thunderstorm, gallop away from the flashing lightning, are said to draw it more surely on their own heads, so his desperate efforts to save himself, only called down more surely the approaching retribution.

The next minute his mind reverted to the corpse again. "This carrion of Dighton," he thought; "it were well, perhaps, to dare the thing openly—to give him a simple but a public funeral—to call the priests to aid, and pay them well. With them, one is always sure to get a good word for one's money.—'Tis but to say he was brought to my house in my absence, and died there while I was away. What have I to do with his death? 'Tis no affair of mine.—I will hie up to the castle, and spy what is going on. Oh, that I could prove that Alured has drank wine or broken bread in the room of Hugh de Monthermer!—That were a stroke indeed! But, at all events, he has been with him. Who can tell how a man may be poisoned? 'Tis at all events suspicious, that he should be

with him just before his death.—I will not go into the court; I will just look through the gates, and speak with the warder for a moment or two. The gates are not closed till nine.” And thus saying, he retrod his steps to the castle gate.

When he reached it there was nobody there; but as he looked through the archway into the court, he saw the figures of the warder and several soldiers standing with their backs turned towards him, gazing towards the other side of the building. There was a bright light coming from that point; and taking a step farther forward, under the archway, he perceived a procession of priests and boys of the chapel, with torches and crucifixes borne before them, while a tall old man was seen carrying reverently the consecrated bread.

The solemn train took its way direct towards the lodging of Alured de Ashby; and turning back with feelings in which were mingled, in a strange and indescribable manner, anguish and satisfaction, horror and relief, Richard de Ashby murmured—“It is done!—it is done!” and sped

his way homeward with the quick but irregular footstep of crime and terror.

It were painful to watch him through the progress of that night. Sleep was banished from his eyelids—sleep, that will visit the couch of utter despair, came not near the troubled brain of doubt, and apprehension, and anxiety. He walked to and fro in his chamber—he laid not down his head upon his bed—he sat gloomily gazing on the pale untrimmed lamp—he rested his eyes upon his folded arms, while dizzy images of sorrow and distress, and dying men, and shame, and agony, and scorn, and anguish here, and punishment hereafter, whirled before his mental vision, from which no effort could shut them out.

Thus passed he the hours, till a faint blue light began to mingle with the glare of the expiring lamp; and then, starting up, he hastily threw on a hood and cloak, and, leaving his servants sleeping in the house, proceeded towards the north gate of the town.

It had been an angry and a stormy night, and the rain, which was running off the rocky streets of Nottingham, still hung upon the green

blades of grass and the boughs of the trees; which on that day came almost up to the walls of the city. The clouds were clearing off, however, and blue patches were seen mingling with the mottled white and grey over head, while to the right of the town a yellow gleam appeared in the sky, showing the rapid coming of the sun.

Such was the scene as Richard de Ashby looked through the gate of Nottingham, which was thronged with peasantry, bringing in their wares to the market even at that early hour. It was a sight refreshing and bright to the eye, and might have soothed any other mind than his; but the fire that burnt internally, that throbbed in his heart and thrilled through his veins, made the cool air of the autumnal morning feel like the chill of fever where shivering cold spreads over the outer frame, while the intense heat remains unquelled within.

One of the first objects that his eye lighted upon was the form of the old woman, standing without the gate, and looking back towards it; and, hurrying on, he was at her side in a minute.

“ Ha, ha !” she said, in her usual broken and tremulous voice, “ you are a lie-a-bed—I thought you were not coming. Well, let us speed on.” And forward she walked, certainly not at the most rapid pace, while Richard de Ashby asked her many a question about old Gaffer Sweeting and his good dame—what was his age? whether he had any sons, and whether there were many cottages thereabout?

The old woman answered querulously, but none the less satisfactorily. He was an old man of seventy-three, she said, and he had had two sons; but one had died in consequence of a fall from a tree, and another had been killed at Lewes.

“ Houses !” she exclaimed. “ Few houses, I trow. Why, that’s the very reason that good Father Mark sent the girl there. Wherever there are houses or young men, there is temptation for us poor women. But this place is quite a desert, like that where the Eremites lived that he talks of. If you don’t tempt her, I don’t know who will, there.”

Thus talking, she tottered on, leading the way through sundry lanes and hamlets; and ex-

plaining to her companion, at each new house they came to, that this was such a place which she had mentioned the night before, and that was another. Very soon, however, the cottages grew less and less in number, for towns had not at that time such extensive undefended suburbs as they have acquired in more peaceful days; and at length they came to the chapel which she had named, the bell of which was going as they approached. The good dame would needs turn in to say a prayer or two, and it was in vain that Richard de Ashby urged her to go forward, for she seemed one of those who harden themselves in their own determinations, as soon as they see themselves in the slightest degree opposed.

“No, no,” she said, “you would not have me pass the chapel, and the bell going, would you? It’s very well for you men, who have no religion at all—so, go on, go on, if you will, I will not be a minute. I have five aves, and a pater-noster, and a ‘credo to repeat, and that wont take me a minute. You can’t miss the way. Go on, I will soon overtake you.”

Richard de Ashby did not think that the



usual rate of the old lady's progression would produce that result ; but, as the idea of prayer, and all connected with it, was unpleasant to his mind, he strode gloomily on, for some hundred yards, from the chapel, revolving still the same painful images which had tormented him during the livelong night.

In a shorter time than he had expected, however, the old woman came out of the chapel ; and he again proceeded on the path, walking on before her, and losing all sight of human habitation, but following a small bye-way, along the sandy ground of which might be traced sundry footsteps, and the marks of a horse's hoofs. Though his step was slow, the old woman did not overtake him for near three quarters of a mile, still keeping in sight and talking to herself as she came after.

The trees soon grew thicker on the left hand, the country more wild and broken on the right ; and, at length, about a hundred' and fifty yards in front, appeared a small, low cottage, or rather hut, resting on the edge of the wood. The path now spread out into an open green space,

a sort of rugged lane some forty yards broad, extending from the spot where Richard de Ashby first saw the cottage, to the low and shattered door; and the place looked so poor and miserable that he said to himself, "If this be the abode the priest has assigned to her, 'twill not be difficult to persuade her to come back to softer things. I will tell her I am going to take her with me to London, and to the gay things of the capital.—Is this the cottage, good dame?" he continued, turning his head over his shoulder, and speaking aloud to the old woman, who was now not more than a couple of yards behind.

"To be sure," replied she; "did I not tell you it was here?"

Richard de Ashby took two or three steps more in advance, straining his eyes upon the hut; but then, he thought he saw first one figure and after that another dart from the wood, and disappear behind the cottage, with a rapidity of movement not like that of old age. A sudden fear came over him, and, stopping short, he exclaimed, "What is this, old hag?—There are men there!"

Dropping the basket from her hand in an instant, with a bound like that of a wild beast, and a loud scream, unlike any tone of a human voice, the old woman sprang upon the shoulders of Richard de Ashby, and writhed her long thin arms through his, with tightening folds, like those of a large serpent.

“Ha, ha, ha!” she shouted. “Come forth, my merry men!—come forth! Tangel has got him!—Tangel has got him! We’ll eat his heart!—we’ll eat his heart!—and roast him over a slow fire!”

In vain Richard de Ashby writhed—in vain he struggled to cast off the grasp of the strange being who held him. With a suppleness and strength almost superhuman, Tangel clung to him like the fatal garment of Alcides, not to be torn away. His fingers seemed made of iron—his arms were as ropes; and Richard de Ashby, casting himself down, rolled over him upon the ground, struggled, and turned, and strove to break loose, without unclasping in the slightest degree the folds in which he held him.

At the same time, the steps of men running

fast reached his ear ; his eye caught the figures of several persons hurrying from the cottage ; and, when Tangel at length relaxed his grasp, Richard de Ashby found himself a prisoner, bound hand and foot.

## CHAPTER XV.

IN a wide, open field, by the side of the Trent, were erected the lists for a battle at *outrance*. All the usual preparations had been made—there was a pavilion for the king to keep his state; there were galleries for the ladies; there were tents for the challenger and the challenged; and there were numerous other booths, for the shelter and refreshment of any who might come from far to witness one of the most solemn acts of chivalry.

Before the hour of eleven, a great multitude had assembled, and every moment the crowd was increasing; for rumours of strange kinds had not only spread through Nottingham, during the early morning, but had found their way to all the country around about, and every

one was eager to see with his own eyes how the whole would end. In all parts of the field men might be seen, each inquiring what the other knew, and, for the most part, each acknowledging his own ignorance of the exact state of the case; although here, as everywhere else, persons were to be found, who pretended to know a great deal of subjects with which they were utterly unacquainted. All that seemed certain was, that the gates of the castle had been shut since the morning, and nobody had been suffered to issue forth, but one or two servants of the King and the Prince, who, after delivering some brief message in the city, had returned immediately, answering no questions, and affording, even accidentally, no information.

Two or three people reported, indeed, that a body of some ten or twelve men had entered the castle, coming from the side of Pontefract. They wore no armour, and did not seem soldiers, and, by the appearance of their dress and horses, it was judged that they had travelled all night. Numerous other rumours, indeed, circulated round the lists, and the opinion was generally gaining ground that there would

be no combat at all, when this supposition was at once done away by the appearance of heralds and pursuivants on the ground, examining it scrupulously, to ascertain that all was clear and fair, without pitfall, trap for the horse's foot, mole-hill, or inequality, which could give an undue advantage to one or other of the combatants.

Shortly after, these officers were followed by several of the King's pages and attendants, who first busied themselves in putting the pavilion prepared for him into neat and proper order, and then stood talking in the front, making great men of themselves, and fancying that they might be mistaken for some of the royal family.

The blast of a trumpet was then heard at a short distance, and, coming at a quick pace, a body of men-at-arms appeared, and took up their station, in military array, at either end of the lists, keeping on the outside of the barriers. A pause of some five minutes ensued, and the people, watching and commenting upon all the arrangements, congratulated themselves on the certainty of seeing two fellow-creatures engage in mortal conflict, and began to speculate upon

which would be the victor. Many there present, merely guided by fancy or report, decided upon the chances of the field without ever having seen either of the two competitors. But there were many of the tenantry of Lindwell, and peasantry from the neighbourhood of the Earl of Ashby's castle, who, of course, maintained the honour of their lord, and asserted that he would win the field from any knight in Europe. It was remarked, however, that even their boldest statements regarding their young lord's prowess were coupled with an expression of their conviction that, "howsoever that might be, they were sure enough the young Lord of Monthermer had never killed the old Earl. Why should he?"

Hugh de Monthermer, indeed, was not without his partisans amongst the people, for he was well known in that part of the country; and a very general feeling that he was both innocent and injured raised up in his favour that generous spirit which is almost always found, though strangely mingled with prejudices and passions, in the bosom of an Englishman.

About half-past eleven, a number of yeomen,



dressed in their holiday clothes, mingled with the crowd. They were without bows, but each had his six arrows at his side, and his short sword and buckler. Each, too, had many acquaintances amongst the crowd; and, with others, to whom they did not actually speak, a gay glance of recognition and a familiar nod were interchanged as they made their way up to the lists.

“What! Miller,” said one of the farmers, as a yeoman in the gay green passed him; “why have you brought your arrows with you? There are no butts here!”

“There are butts everywhere, Winken,” replied the person addressed.

“But you have no bow,” rejoined the countryman.

“Bows wont be wanted, if we need them,” answered the yeoman, and passed on.

Scarcely was this conversation concluded, when, slowly riding down from the side of Nottingham, was seen a gallant train of gentlemen, and many a fair lady, too, it must be confessed, notwithstanding the bloody nature of the scene about to be performed.

“The King!—the King!” shouted many voices; “the King and the Prince! God bless Prince Edward!”

But few added the monarch’s name to the benediction. All that Henry heard, however, was the shout of gratulation; and, fancying himself popular, he bowed gracefully to the people, and rode on to the entrance of the pavilion prepared for him, which was soon filled with the lords and ladies of his court.

To the surprise of most there present, the Princess Eleanor was seen upon the King’s right hand, and many were the comments made upon her appearing, for the first time, to witness a judicial combat.

In the meanwhile, Prince Edward, followed by several heralds in their brilliant tabards, and accompanied by two knights unarmed, rode on to the other end of the lists and entered the field. He himself was clothed in a shining hauberk of steel rings, with a hood of the same, but with his *chapel de fer*, shield, and lance, borne by esquires on foot. His face was thus completely seen, and it was gay and smiling. His princely carriage—his commanding height—his

management of the strong fiery horse that bore him—his frank and noble expression of countenance—all had their effect upon the hearts of the people around; and loud and reiterated shouts of gratulation rent the sky as he rode along the lists.

After he had spoken for a few minutes with the heralds and pursuivants, Edward turned to one of the knights who had accompanied him, saying, “Go to the Earl of Ashby’s tent, and tell him, he is too weak to fight in this day’s field.—The yeoman who first drank of the cup is dead, you say?”

“He died very shortly after, my lord,” replied the knight, “having scarce time to make confession, and to acknowledge that, when Sir Richard had left the Earl’s lodging, he went into the chamber, and finding the cup wellnigh full of wine, drank it off.”

“It must have been a subtle poison, indeed,” rejoined the Prince; “Gadsden tells me it cost him all his skill to save the Earl. But go to him, and say that he is too weak. If he will withdraw the charge, well—if not, let him put off the

combat for a week. No dishonour shall follow in either case."

The knight rode away, and Edward, turning to the other who had accompanied him, demanded—"They have not found him yet?"

"No, my lord," replied the other; "every place was searched in vain. There lay the dead body in the room above. It is that of a man called Dighton. I knew his face at once, having seen him often with Ellerby, and other such scurvy cattle, hanging about London and Westminster."

"Sir John has got a short answer," said the Prince, as looking towards a tent at the western corner of the lists he saw the knight he had sent away remounting his horse to return. "I have seldom seen a man so obstinate."

In two minutes the messenger was by the Prince's side again.

"He will not hear of it, my lord," exclaimed the knight as he rode up; "he declares that men, indeed, would call him coward now, if for a few hours' sickness he should shirk the conflict."

“ Well, then, it must go on,” replied the Prince, looking down ; “ he may find himself mistaken yet. Go to the other tent, and speak with Sir John Hardy ; see what he says.”

While the knight was absent, the Prince rode round the lists, and approached the spot where Henry and Eleanor were seated. He spoke a few words to each ; but as he was about to turn away, Eleanor, whose look displayed some small anxiety, bent her head forward and asked, in a low voice, “ Are you quite sure, dear lord ?”

“ I think so,” answered the Prince ; but yet I see no one appear. It will never be too late, however, to interpose myself.—The letter said they would be here before the time.—Ha ! here comes the challenger !”

At the moment that he spoke his eyes were fixed upon the tent or pavilion of the young Earl of Ashby, from which was seen to issue forth a figure clothed in a complete suit of armour—consisting of the hauberk, or shirt of mail, the chausses of mail, and the casque of steel, with a crest and a moving visor, or avantaille of bars. He wore no pourpoint over his armour ; and

the only thing that distinguished him from the ordinary man at arms were the poylins, or joints of steel plates at the knees and arms of the hauberk, which were the first approximation to the plate armour which soon after came into use.

All eyes were turned in that direction, as well as those of the Prince; and every one remarked, that the young Earl leaned, as he walked from the entrance of the tent to his horse's side, upon the arm of Sir Harry Grey, who appeared in the field as his godfather. And as the rumour had become by this time general, that an attempt had been made to poison him on the preceding night, a loud murmur ran amongst the people of—"He's not fit! he's not fit!—Don't let him fight!"

But Alured de Ashby put his foot into the stirrup, and mounted his horse with apparent difficulty, but then sat firm and upright in the saddle.

"Well, beast," he cried, patting the charger's neck, "thou canst bear the arms that weary me." And moving onward to the other end of the lists, his attendants following with his lance

and shield, he saluted the King and Princess as he passed, and bowed his head lowly to the Prince.

“ This is mere madness, my good lord,” said Edward, riding up to his side ; “ I really feel that, as judge of the field, I cannot let this go on.”

“ I must do my devoir, fair sir,” answered Alured de Ashby. “ I am neither craven nor recreant ; and here I stand in arms to defend my honour.”

Edward was about to reply ; but, at that moment, the knight he had sent to the other pavilion approached at a quick pace, and whispered something in the Prince’s ear.

“ That they are ready for the field !” said Edward, in a tone of amazement. “ What may this mean ?—Well, let the heralds make proclamation, then ; and we will part the sun and wind.”

At a sign from the Prince’s truncheon, or warder, the trumpet sounded aloud, and a herald, spurring forward his horse, proclaimed that all persons were to quit the field but the knight challenger and his respondent, the heralds,

and officers of arms, the judge of the combat, and his esquires.

A momentary bustle and much confusion took place, for a number of persons, upon one pretence or another, were at this time within the lists. But all was soon clear, and Alured de Ashby being placed in the spot adjudged by the heralds to the challenger, braced on his shield, and took his lance in his hand, bearing it perpendicular with the steel in the air, and the other end resting on his foot. An esquire unarmed stood on each side, with two pages behind; and the field being clear, Sir Harry Grey placed a purse of gold in the hands of the principal herald, saying, "That for the good knight's casque."

The herald bowed his head, replying, "Largesse! noble sir. Is the combat both of lance and sword?"

"That matters not," said Sir Harry Grey; "he pays for the lance, and the lance covers the sword."

The herald then spurred forward some twenty steps, followed by his pursuivants, and after a



loud flourish of the trumpets, proclaimed that there stood Alured, Earl of Ashby, ready to do battle against Hugh of Monthermer, Lord of Amesbury, on certain charges brought by him, Alured, against the said Hugh, having first made oath, according to the law of arms, that his quarrel was just and righteous, and was ready to wager his body on God's decision. "Now, if the said Hugh of Monthermer," continued the herald, "will maintain that the said charge is false and groundless, and venture his body in that behalf, let him appear before the third sound of the trumpet, or if not, let him surrender himself into the hands of our Lord the King, to be dealt with according to his demerits!—Oyez! oyez! oyez! Let no man, on pain of forfeiture of life or limb, according to the pleasure of the King, give any comfort or encouragement to either the said Alured, Earl of Ashby, or Hugh, Lord of Monthermer, by sign, word, or cry; and let God defend the right!—Sound trumpets!"

A long loud call of the trumpet succeeded, and all looks turned towards the other pavilion,

before which appeared two horses fully caparisoned, the banner of the house of Monthermer, and several pages and attendants. The pavilions themselves, it must be remarked, were encircled with rails, joining those of the lists, but separated from the actual field of combat by a small movable barricade. Behind the tent, on which every one was now looking, and at the side of it farthest from the royal scaffolding, a good deal of bustle and confusion seemed to be taking place; and the space of time allotted after the first call of the trumpet passed away without any one appearing to answer the challenge.

“Sound again!” cried the herald, and again the blast of the trumpet was heard, upon which the hangings of the tent were almost immediately drawn back, and Hugh de Monthermer, armed, but bare headed, advanced towards the barrier.

“This is not right,” murmured the Prince, when first his eyes fell upon him; but the next instant he saw more. On the right hand of Hugh was Sir John Hardy, and on the left his uncle, the old Earl of Monthermer. Two

esquires bore the knight's lance and shield, a page between them carried his helmet; and in this guise the whole party advanced on foot towards the barrier, which was raised to give them admission into the lists. But close behind them came four men, bearing on their shoulders something like a bier, covered with a little tilt and curtains formed of some light cloth. A party of yeomen followed, guarding two men, who walked between them, with their arms tied. Their hoods were turned back, exposing the whole head and face; and, as they advanced, the first of the two prisoners rolled his eyes fiercely round, with a look like that of a maniac; while the second bent his gaze steadfastly upon the ground, and never gave a glance on either side.

“Ha! What is this?” exclaimed Alured de Ashby. “What means all this?—Ah! I see now!—’Tis Richard they have got—and the dead body in the bier, most like.—My lord, I guess the rest!”

“And so do I,” said Edward; “let us ride on and see.”

Both spurred forward quickly at the same

moment, and reached the spot before the royal pavilion, just as Hugh de Monthermer paused there also.

“ Now Hugh, now,” cried the Prince ; “ What is all this ? But first, my good lord,” he continued, extending his hand to the old Earl, “ welcome back to your duty, and to England. My lord the King, may not your son promise this gentleman grace and pardon ?”

It is probable that at any other time Henry would not have yielded without much entreaty ; but at this moment he was too eager for explanations to hesitate, and bowing his head, he replied, “ Well, be it so.—What now ?”

“ My lord,” said Hugh, “ I come before your grace to prove my innocence as may seem fit unto your grace to order, either in arms, according to the challenge given, or by still better proof, if so you will.”

“ None can be better, sir,” answered the King ; “ God’s own decision must surely be more just than that of men.”

“ Well, sire,” replied Hugh de Monthermer, with a smile ; “ be it as your grace pleases.

Alured," he continued, holding out his hand, "if I needs must fight with you, I must, but you will be compelled to seek some other cause than your good father's death. Of that, at least, I am innocent, whatever I be guilty of.—Here is a witness cannot lie.—Draw back the curtains.—Will you believe himself?"

Alured de Ashby, already pale, turned for an instant paler still, but it seemed as if the blood had but withdrawn itself into the fountain of the heart to gush forth again, purified, renewed, invigorated. For a moment he was as white as the ashes of an extinguished fire, but the next his cheek glowed, his eyes sparkled, and springing from his horse, with a light bound, as if all sickness were departed, he cast himself upon his knees beside the litter, in which, lying on a soft bed, but partly raised upon his arm, appeared the old Earl of Ashby. The son dewed the father's hand with his tears; then starting up and casting his arms round Hugh de Monthermer, he pressed him to his mailed breast, exclaiming, "I have injured you!—forgive me, my good brother!"

Hugh wrung his hand, and said, "This is all joyful, Alured ; but there is something painful still behind. There stand the murderers !—the assassin and his tool ! My lord the King, into your hands I give them, to be dealt with as in your high judgment you shall deem expedient. The one makes full confession of his crime, the other has not the daring to deny it ; and indeed, it would be useless so to do ; for, as the very consequences of our sins prove often by God's will their punishments, a poor unhappy girl, whom he seduced from virtue and her peaceful home, overheard in his house the foul conspiracy for murdering this good earl, and charging the crime on me. She told it to those she thought might best prevent it, who came not in time to stop the deed, but soon enough to find the Earl, and staunch the bleeding of his wounds, before life was extinct. She is now ready, though her heart is broke, to give such evidence as leaves no doubt of these men's guilt, even if they still denied it."

"Oh, villain!" said Alured de Ashby, gazing on his cousin, who still looked fiercely from

under his frowning brows upon him. "Oh, villain! To bring such a stain upon our house!"

"Hush, Alured, hush!" said the old Earl, "I will beseech my lord the King to pardon him."

"Ay, pardon me! pardon me!" cried Richard de Ashby, darting forward. "King, I saved your son from bondage—I gave him means of flight!—But for me there had been no Evesham—but for me De Montfort had still ruled—but for me you had both been prisoners at this hour."

"What say you, Edward?" asked the King.

"I beseech you, my lord, pardon him, pardon him," exclaimed Mortimer and Pembroke, in a breath.

"My lord, I dare not speak," said Edward, "for though justice calls for the death of the blackest villain I ever did yet know, gratitude ties my tongue. I must not speak."

"Untie his hands," cried the King, after a moment's pause. "We give him life, but banish him the realm for ever. If in ten days he be found within the seas, let him be put to death!"

"Thanks! my lord, thanks!" exclaimed

Richard de Ashby, while the yeomen unwillingly loosed his arms from the cords.

As soon as he was free, he passed his cousin and Hugh de Monthermer, as if to cut straight across the lists ; but when he had taken two or three steps, he turned and shook his clenched fist at them, crying, "Curses upon ye both!—but the time for vengeance may yet come!—I have not done with you!"

Even while he spoke there was a little movement amongst the crowd beyond the barriers ; and as he turned again to pursue his way, a loud, clear, powerful voice, which was heard echoing over the whole field, exclaimed, in the English tongue, "This for the heart of the murderous traitor, Richard de Ashby!—Whom kings spare, commons send to judgment!"

None saw the man from whom the voice proceeded ; but, the moment after, there came a sharp sound, like the twang of a bowstring, the whistle of a shaft through the air, and then a dull stroke, such as an arrow makes when it hits a target.

A shrill scream, like that of a wounded sea-



bird, burst from the lips of Richard de Ashby, and casting up his arms in the air, as if in the effort to clutch at something for support, he fell back upon the grass.

Several persons ran up; but he was dead! The arrow had gone through and through his heart; and between the peacock feathers, that winged it on its way, was found written, "Robin Hood."

Almost at the same moment a tall, stout yeoman was seen to mount a white horse, at the other side of the lists, and ride away from the field. He proceeded, at no very quick pace, and, as he went, he hummed lightly to some old, long-forgotten air,

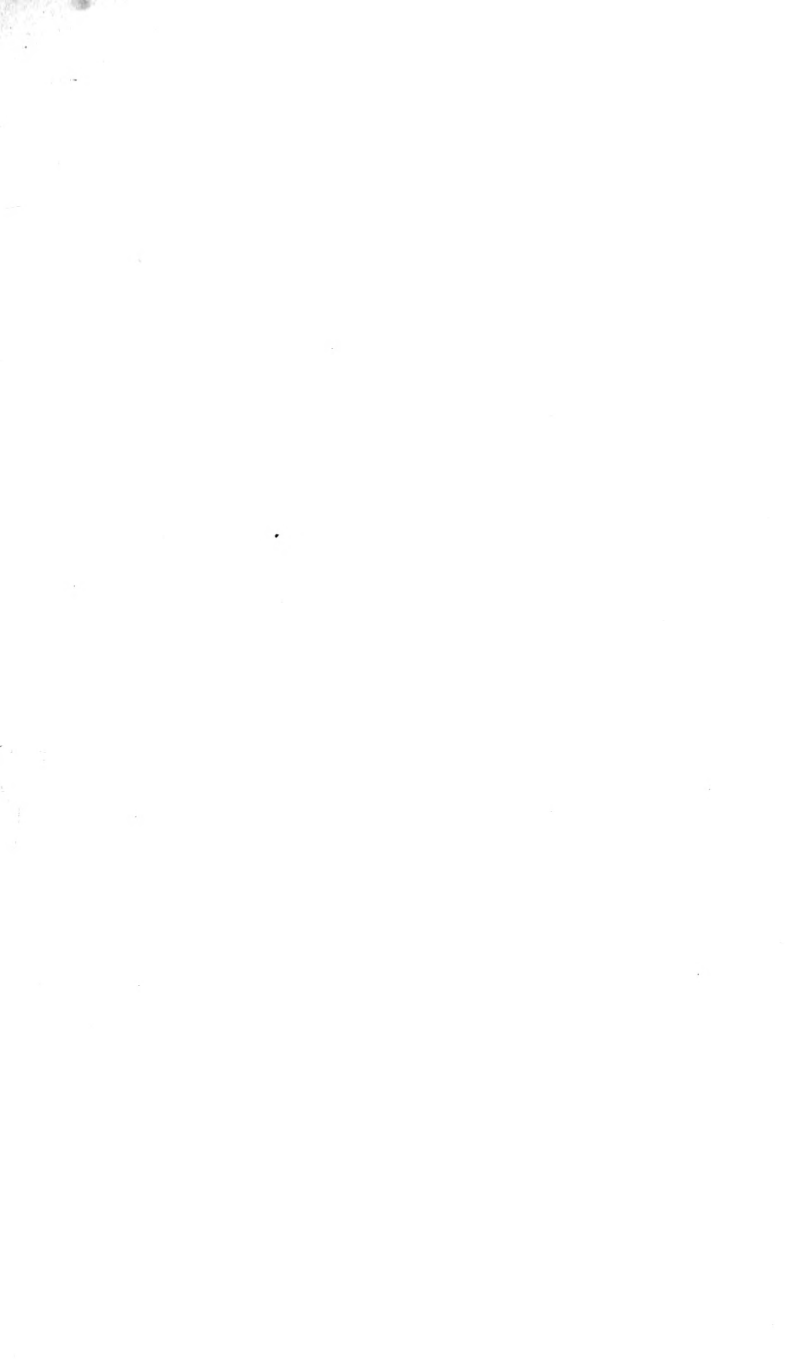
"And this is the end of Robin Lythe  
And his knave Gandelyne."

THE END.













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